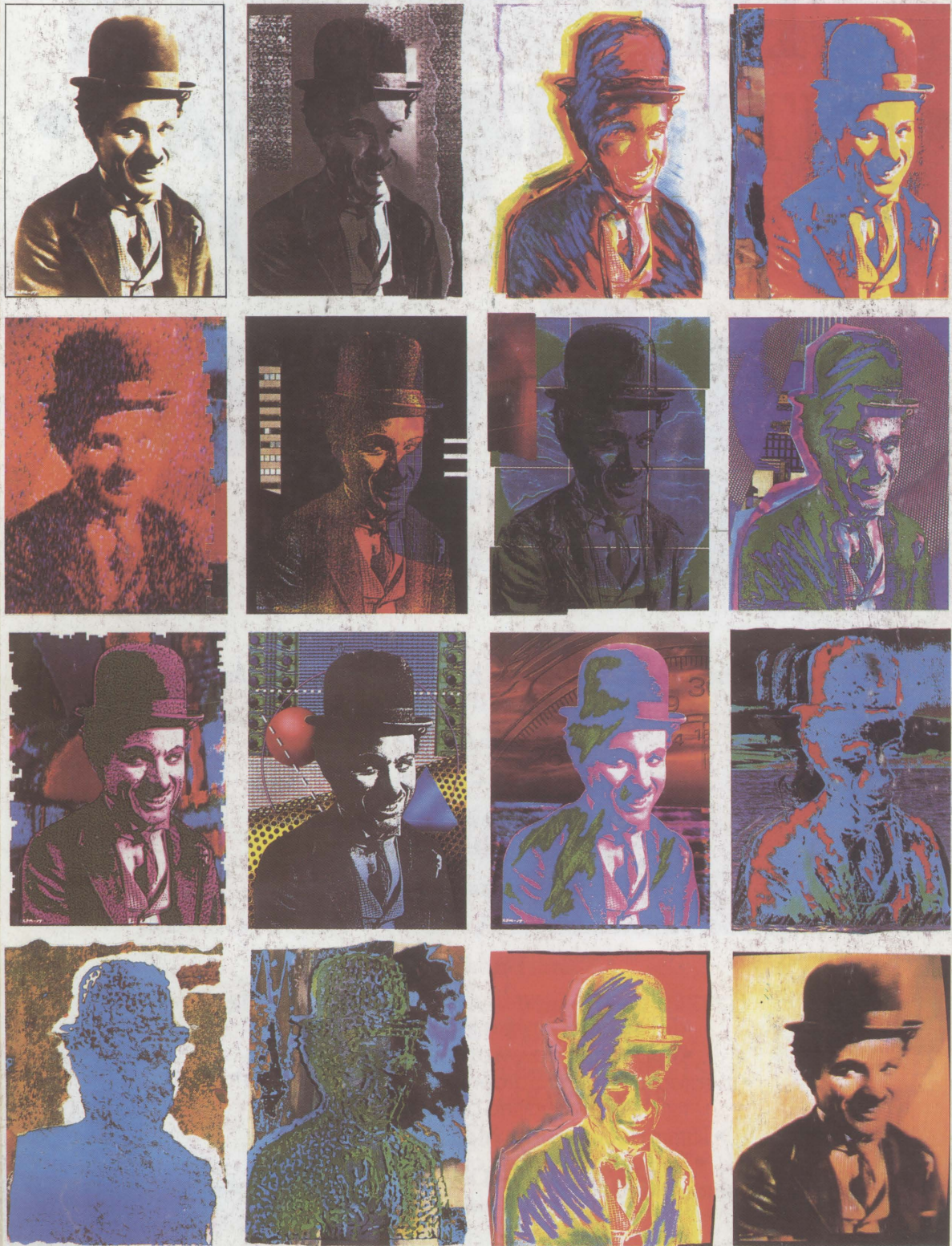


SIGHT & SOUND

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Andrei Plakhov: Soviet Cinema Now
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SIGHT & SOUND

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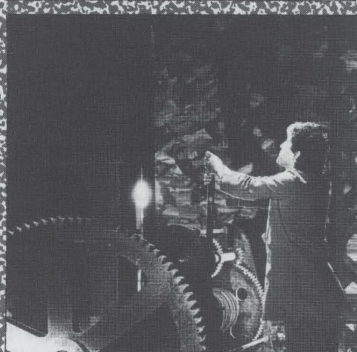
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Illustration, Geoff Wiggins.

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ROTTERDAM

Magic from Rivette and Ivens

When he died last July, Hubert Bals had already selected twenty films for his eighteenth Rotterdam Festival, and embarked on retrospectives devoted to John Cassavetes and Jacques Rivette. Rather than try to second-guess his preferences for the rest of the programme, interim director Anne Head and her able staff invited several film-makers associated with Bals to complete the selection with neglected titles of their own or other choices. This quick galvanising of energies resulted in the best of the six consecutive Rotterdam festivals I've attended. The event was haunted by recent losses—Cassavetes and Jacques Ledoux, as well as Bals—but the legacies they left behind were vibrantly present on the screen.

Raul Ruiz brought two engaging new featurettes, *Tous les nuages sont des horloges* (a free adaptation of a Japanese mystery co-scripted by his students) and *L'Autel de l'amitié* (a series of Diderotesque dialogues about the French Revolution), both bristling with visual invention. A lush and aggressive 27-minute videotape by Godard, *Puissance de la parole*, concentrates on a lovers' quarrel conducted by phone from opposite sides of the globe, while Carlos Reichenbach's *Film Demencia*, which I was only able to sample, seemed an exhilarating, cockeyed retelling of the Faust legend in contemporary San Paolo. One tribute to Bals consisted of shorts—including a structural exercise from Peter Greenaway, segments by Ioselliani and Passer, and a conversation between Kieslowski and Agnieszka Holland filmed by the latter.

But for me the supreme Bals legacies were his own selections that opened and (virtually) closed the festival: Joris Ivens and Marceline Loris's *A Story of the Wind* and Rivette's legendary 13-hour *Out 1* (1971)—both mind-bending masterworks in the grand Rotterdam tradition, each one epochal in a very different way. If *Out 1*: *Noli me Tangere* offers a backward glance to two intersecting culminations—the collective ideals of the 60s and the theories of André Bazin, both tested here well past the breaking point—Ivens and Loris's poetic documentary-fantasy seems to have been made (as Tian Zhuangzhuang said of his *The Horse Thief*) for the twenty-first century.

The inclusion of Rivette's latest feature, *La Bande des quatre*, in the Berlin competition precluded its appearance in Rot-



A Story of the Wind: Joris Ivens.

terdam, but two other Rivette premieres more than made up for its absence: the original 3-hour *L'Amour par terre* (1984), an hour longer than the release version, and *Out 1*, whose only previous public screening (in 1971) was in workprint form. (The film remained unprocessed until the French government recently subsidised a print—a cherished project of Jacques Ledoux as well as Bals—and the reels were rushed to the festival straight from the lab.)

For most viewers, alas, the length of such films automatically places them 'outside competition,' and it was no surprise to find them sparsely attended. But Rivette sorely needs his extended structures, and both films demonstrate beyond any doubt that the more extended they are, the more lucid their intentions become. At two hours, *L'Amour par terre* seemed mainly a rehash of Rivettean intrigues about theatre, and I feared an additional hour would only mean more of the same. But in fact most of this hour focuses on the sexual relationships of the two heroines (Geraldine Chaplin and Jane Birkin), and the film falls into place as a classically balanced story about friendship and betrayal, with theatre now serving a much more marginal role. While it still can't be regarded as major Rivette, it can no longer be deemed a failure like *Hurlvent*.

By contrast, both versions of *Out 1*, which grew out of 30 hours of improvisation with over three dozen actors, have an integrity and legitimacy of their own—the serial of eight episodes

made for (but rejected by) French tv, and the four-hour *Spectre* derived from this serial a year later. Although both films tell roughly the same story, the serial is much lighter and airier, with very little of the anguished and fractured paranoid texture of *Spectre*. While the latter is constructed as an infernal and insoluble puzzle, the former mainly unfolds like a comic pseudo-documentary with the density of a nineteenth-century novel.

Both films chart the gradual merging of four plots centred round two experimental theatre groups and two isolated individuals (Juliet Berto and Jean-Pierre Léaud), but the meanings generated are far from identical. Broadly speaking, the Bazinian, long-take *Noli me Tangere* is the Rossellini or Rouch version of the story; the anti-Bazinian, aggressively edited and splintered *Spectre* is the Lang version. One of the most striking differences in the long version is that Michel Lonsdale, the director of one of the theatre groups, emerges as the central character—not only because of his role in guiding his group's improvisations and psychic self-explorations, but also because his ambiguous role as a rather infantile patriarch becomes pivotal to the overall movement of the plot.

The gradual disintegration of collectivity which the film charts reaches its hair-raising climax in the final 90-minute episode, when each of the four major characters—Bulle Ogier, Léaud, Berto and Lonsdale—goes to pieces in a separate extended

sequence. Lonsdale's scene is placed last, and his reduction to a mass of blubbing jelly on a beach seems to bring the film full circle from the wordless hysteria of his group's first exercise.

A Story of the Wind, a one-of-its-kind autobiographical effort, features 90-year-old Joris Ivens as its protagonist and focuses on his ambition to film the wind—a subject that winds up involving his own asthma, the history of China (where most of the film is set), the Third World in general, the history of cinema and a good deal more. The film's nearest siblings are *Sans Soleil*, *The Horse Thief*, *Brightness* and *Testament d'Orphée* (although, as Simon Field points out, it is the Orpheus myth co-authored by Eurydice: Loris apparently wrote most of the script).

Everything from the windmills in Ivens' native Holland to the woodwinds in Michel Portal's eclectic score becomes part of the poetic texture, and when Ivens appears in a studio recreation of *Trip to the Moon*, one realises in a flash that he is a virtual contemporary of the Méliès film.

Elemental in more ways than one, the film reaches its climax in the Chinese desert, where two electric fans are installed to coax the wind out of hiding for a waiting film crew. Summing up both his life and the present century, Ivens remarks, 'I believe in magic—it's not just science that works wonders.' His credo proved a fitting motto for Rotterdam '89, where magic was alive and well.

JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

HAVANA

What makes a Latin American film?

Ten years ago the Havana film festival set out on a brave course not simply of bringing together national cinemas of Latin America and projecting them, but of defining and even creating a sub-continental cinema to be celebrated. It was to be industrially and ideologically uncowed, an independent and powerful cinema of the 'backyard'.

That year, 1979, the first prize for documentary went to Patricio Guzman's *Battle of Chile*, a film that now seems of legendary importance. Glauber Rocha, Fernando Solanas, Humberto Solas, Guzman himself, all contributed to the accretion of manifestos for this new cinema, based on an acknowledgment of a Latin American culture brought together not only by a common language (almost), but also by a common set of relationships with the United States. Rocha wrote: 'An economically and technically underdeveloped cinema need not automatically be culturally underdeveloped. The political is, among other things, an intellectual position which can become a praxis capable of overcoming the conditioning of a society forced into inferiority.' All this reflected a common political perception: a set of left nationalist movements locked in intense struggles, who understood one another.

Havana in 1988 made one consider this short history, because the cultural atmosphere of social-

ism in consolidation is so different from the heady atmosphere of struggle. It seems time to interrogate the rhetoric via the films. Three contenders for first prize in the fiction competition offered difficult choices in the year's rolling definition of an essential Latin American Film. Francisco Lombardi's *La Boca del Lobo* (Peru) dealt with the barbarity of the Peruvian military in a powerful, fairly conventional style. *Plaf!*, a Cuban black comedy, treated the potentially controversial subjects of Yaruba (a Caribbean magical religion based on ritual, officially frowned upon, but tolerated) and bureaucratic inertia. Championed by Cuban progressives at a moment when Castro was publicly denouncing *perestroika* and declaring that Cuba was 'not a Baltic state', the film is occasionally very funny but politically mild in comparison with its Soviet and Eastern European counterparts.

Finally, Fernando Solanas' powerful allegory *El Sur*, which won but generated a very revealing discussion along the way. Having developed a critical realist style of political thriller which seems to 'fit' so many of its current objectives, the old guard is beginning to see films like *El Sur*, with its resonant Brechtian dialogue and its embracing of personal politics, as 'typically Argentinian', 'arty', 'self-indulgent', while openly praising Solanas and acknowledging him as an important figure in the cinema they are forging. Behind this contradictory message is the frustration of a real fragmentation, which identifies Latin America's two most highly

developed film industries, those of Brazil and Argentina, as potentially problematic to the definition of this Cuban version of a pan-Latin American culture.

Behind such problems lie the difficult realities of finance. Increasingly, Latin American feature production is paid for by Spanish television. Counting the films shown in Havana, TVE are currently involved in 55 co-productions across the continent, including a series called *Amores Dificiles*, six adaptations of García Márquez by well-known directors, including Ruy Guerra and Tomas Gutierrez Alea, which we can expect to see on the BBC quite soon.

The hopes of a future pan-continental movement are heavily invested in the two-year-old Film School of the Three Worlds, a characteristically ambitious internationalist enterprise which could only be based in Cuba (it is paid for by an institute which covers the continent and the school is technically outside Cuba, in diplomatic space). Delegates were offered bus trips to the school, an hour from Havana, which brings together students with no previous training and from Third World countries only, under the tutelage of Fernando Birri and a revolving cast of international teachers. Gabriel García Márquez serves as head of the script department and has been instrumental in raising the huge cost of the school, which is expected to have 330 students by 1990.

So far the school has made *Variety* by disciplining some students who made politically problematic documentary projects—

one made a vox pop film about what might happen to Cuban politics after Fidel Castro's death. These reports, however, are mostly distortions of an initiative which has the potential to contribute a great deal to the film cultures of the Third World. It seems a reasonable hope that some of what Birri grandiosely calls his 'workers of light' will contribute over the next few years to the debate about what's so Latin American about a Latin American film.

BEN GIBSON

EUROPEAN FILM AWARDS

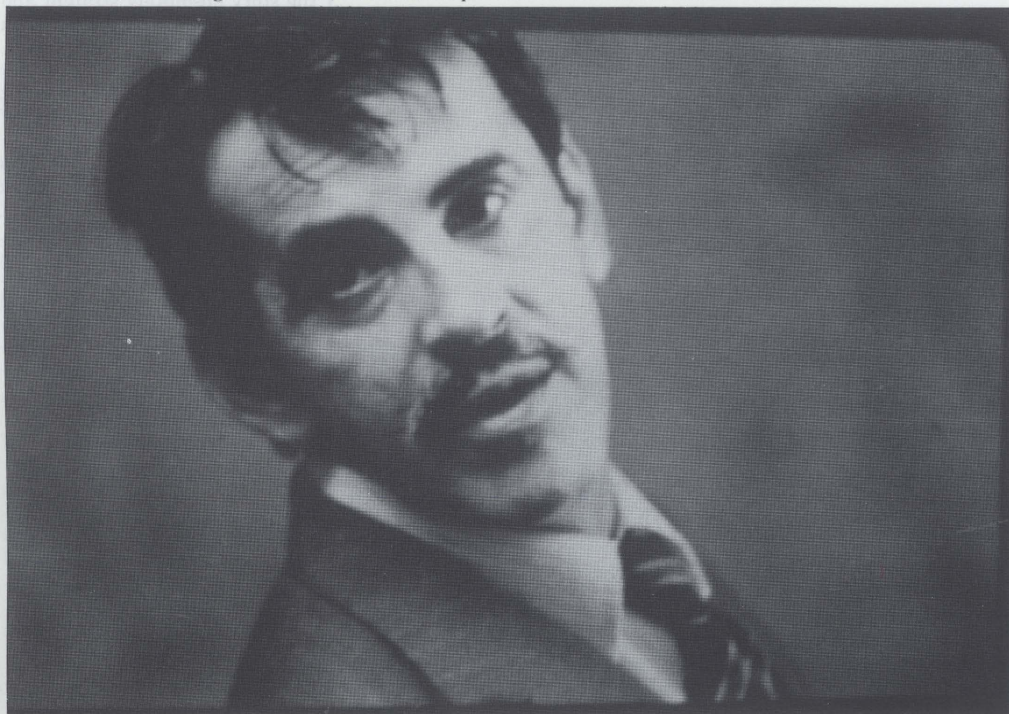
Berlin launches the Felix, Europe's Oscar

When Dr Volker Hassemer, Berlin's Senator for Cultural Affairs, first suggested the idea of an annual set of European film awards, rivalling Hollywood's Oscars, no one took him very seriously except the Senate itself. The politicians thought it an excellent way to prove West Berlin was the natural site for Europe's cultural aspirations in the film field. The British, not surprisingly, seemed to be the last to climb on the bandwagon and might not have done so at all but for the consistent advocacy of Sir Richard Attenborough and Channel 4's David Rose, who got Jeremy Isaacs to nominate the two British films in the competition—Terence Davies' *Distant Voices*, *Still Lives* in the Best Film category and Mike Figgis' *Stormy Monday* in the Best Young Film section.

But after the star-studded television show last November the general feeling was surprisingly positive. Berlin had spent some three million pounds on the event, and had been rewarded if not repaid with an audience reckoned to be in the region of 300 million (which included the Soviet Union, whose decision to take the two-and-a-half hour television spectacular live must have accounted for at least half that number). Added to that, there was a weekend during which it was almost impossible to get a hotel room in the city owing to the influx of film people, journalists and television crews from most if not all the 27 European countries involved.

Dr Hassemer, a young Christian Democrat on the liberal wing of his party, was entitled to feel very pleased with himself—encouraged enough, at any rate, to suggest that, if no other city could be found to host the event in 1989, Berlin would continue its sponsorship. But he hoped

Frank Ramirez in *Milagro en Roma*, Lisandro Duque's film in the series 'Amores Dificiles'.



that, by 1990, another city could be found to take up the baton—the present favourite being Glasgow, the European City of Culture for that year, if enough money can be raised through sponsorship.

The awards process, like the show itself, at which one of the British presenters was a lionised Joan Collins, was not without its hitches. Nominators in each country were sometimes none too carefully chosen, so that the candidates for Best Film and Best Young Film were perhaps more controversial than they need have been. Added to that, nobody quite knew what Best Young Film actually meant, beyond the fact that it didn't apparently mean a film by a young director. There was also no documentary prize, with the result that the entry for Best Young Film from Finland, the intriguing *From Russia with Rock*, had to be disqualified. But the international nominating jury for the finals, faced with seeing about fifty films in ten days with translators in attendance, stoically stuck to its task, though somewhat groggy at the end of it.

Curiously, the only falling out that occurred within this jury was caused by the eventual winner of the Best Film 'Felix'—Krzysztof Kieslowski's *A Short Film About Killing*. Three defended it passionately; four were against it being one of the seven nominated. In the end, the three got their way, largely with the argument that there was little chance that the controversial film, given only the minor Jury Prize at Cannes, would actually win. In fact, the voting on the second international jury was five to two in favour of the Polish film. On the other hand, *Distant Voices, Still Lives* was nominated for Best Film, Best Director, Best Screenplay, Best Music and Best Supporting Actress (Freda Dowie). This was more than any other film achieved, but the second jury gave it nothing.

Davies, in Berlin for the ceremonies, took his disappointment with some grace and was pleased when Wim Wenders, who won the Best Director Felix for *Wings of Desire*, told him that he had just seen *Distant Voices, Still Lives* and liked it so much that he felt it would have been an honour to lose to him. There were many, too, from the international press who felt that Davies should have been more generously treated in view of the first jury's enthusiasm for the film.

The twin highlights of the television show were undoubtedly the career awards given to Ingmar Bergman and Marcello Mastroianni, who were both pre-

sent and visibly moved to receive them. Mastroianni got his from Giulietta Masina, his partner in *Ginger and Fred*. Bergman, dark-suited and walking with the aid of a stick, accepted his from Nastassia Kinski, who was so overcome by the occasion that she could scarcely read the speech prepared for her. That was understandable since the lengthy standing ovation Bergman had just received from the assembled throng in the Theatre des Westons, with many unashamedly brushing away their tears, was the most unforgettable moment of the whole proceedings.

Others who got special awards were Richard Attenborough, as a producer, director and actor who consistently espoused humanitarian causes, and Bernardo Bertolucci, presumably for storming Hollywood with *The Last Emperor*. Finally, the awards seem to have generated a demand for a European Film Academy on the general lines of the American version which might in the end have a stake in their organisation and also establish a fund for the training and encouragement of young film-makers.

It looks as if the European Film Awards are here to stay. And since the two main ones carry a substantial financial reward with them as the basis of a budget for a new film, they seem usefully poised to do some good. Added to that, each nominated film, actor or director receives a citation, which some of the smaller countries whose films reached the finals are now proudly displaying.

DEREK MALCOLM

KING BOOTS

The lady with the large dog

Following the success in the United States of his singular 'documentary' *The Thin Blue Line*—one of the few films to have directly influenced the judicial appeal of a man wrongly sentenced for murder—the director Errol Morris is about to embark on a new 'murder mystery', a feature provisionally titled *The Trial of King Boots*. The story is true; this time, however, the defendant is an Old English Sheepdog, 'the winningest showdog in US history'.

The project began as a documentary: the dog's owners, Mr and Mrs Charles Schwarb, went to court in Detroit in 1985 to prevent the destruction of King Boots, which had been found, its mouth caked with blood, near the body of Mrs Schwarb's mother, Mrs Gertrude Monroe. Morris, a documentary-maker among whose films is *Gates of Heaven* (1978), a macabrely humorous account of two famous California pet cemeteries, chanced on the story and began his researches by paying for a transcript of the byzantine 6,000-page legal proceedings.

'It was the best documentary material I had ever shot,' Morris said on a recent visit to London. 'Sue Weil, the then head of programming for the PBS television network in Washington, wanted me to keep filming. She kept giving me money: without her I'd be working in a Burger King. I shot seven interviews before realising that here was material

for a memorable American Tale: a story that got to the heart of an American family and its values. It was also an odyssey: the men—Mr Schwarb, King Boots, the vet—forever on the road, making money showing the dog; the women left at home, feeling resentful.'

The story as told by Morris, a humorous, tenaciously obsessive man, to whom things clearly happen, is bizarre almost to the point of incredibility. Did Boots 'murder' Mrs Monroe, to whom, apparently, he was devoted? Dr William Brooks, the coroner, performed an autopsy and concluded that Mrs Monroe 'died from multiple bites and slashes caused by the attack of a canine.' The Schwarbs, however, paid for a second opinion from a Dr Henry Kallet: Mrs Monroe died from a heart attack. He found only one bite.

The arguments raged. Eventually, Dr Huff, King Boots' vet, was allowed to see his impounded and by now distressed charge. 'He was, after all, used to being groomed twice a day.' The vet discovered a wound in the dog's nose made, it seemed, by the fork found mysteriously tangled in the telephone cord near Mrs Monroe's body. Had the old lady, who was given to wandering the house carrying kitchen utensils, tripped over the sleeping dog, stabbed him, been bitten once in return and suffered a heart attack?

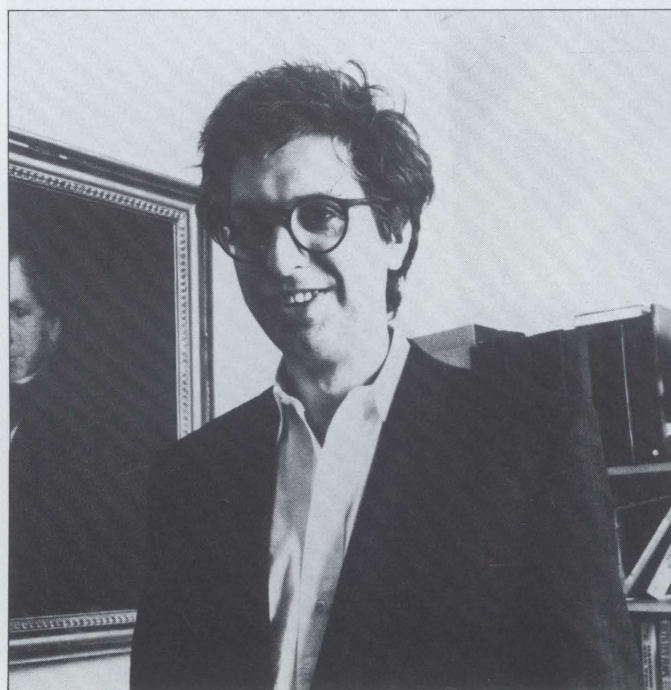
'The dog was eventually exonerated . . . but died later under mysterious circumstances.' American Playhouse has pledged \$1m to the project and producer Edward R. Pressman (*Walker, Paris by Night*) is assembling a further \$4m. 'I intend to tell the story absolutely straight and I hope with mostly unknown players. Features, however, demand names and Christopher Walken has expressed interest in the role of the Schwarbs' lawyer.'

Morris is also working on a documentary—'though I really don't like documentaries, except for the work of Fred Wiseman, *Sinai Field Mission* in particular'—about a Texas forensic psychiatrist, the self-styled 'Dr Death', who is regularly called in capital cases in order to secure the death penalty by testifying that the defendant is likely to kill again.

'I have spent an awful lot of time in the past year interviewing killers. Ninety-nine per cent of what I discovered while making *The Thin Blue Line* I was unable to include in the film. I have been approached by a publisher about a book on the case—and I think that I might be able to include about 10 to 15 per cent more.'

JOHN PYM

Errol Morris.



MELIES

An NFA discovery

'A lost Méliès film, *Combat Naval en Grèce* (1897, 54ft), turned up recently in the National Film Archive where it had remained hidden under an assumed title, *Action on Deck of Warship*, and catalogued as an English film of about 1904,' writes John Barnes. 'The clue to the film's true identity was a frame illustration in *Photograms of the Year 1897* which was reproduced in my book *The Rise of the Cinema in Great Britain*.

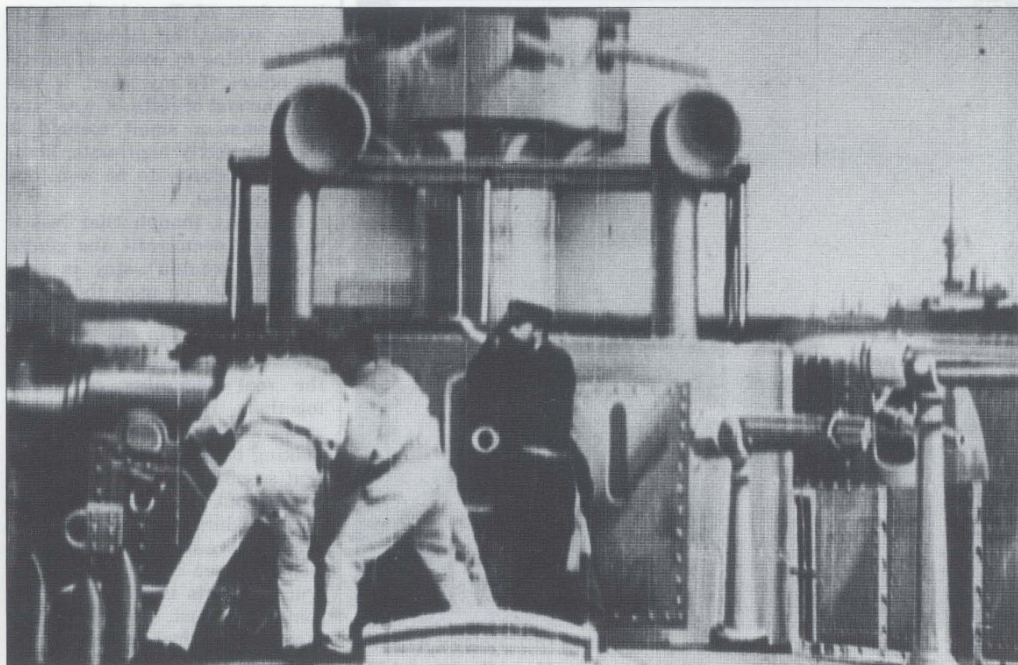
'While reading the NFA's catalogue of non-fiction films, the description of film No 1066, *Action on Deck of Warship*, "a studio reconstruction, 56ft", alerted me to the possibility that this might be the Georges Méliès film which I had illustrated. An archive viewing was arranged and the film proved to be the one I had suspected, *Combat Naval en Grèce* (No 110 in the Méliès catalogue), one of a series of reconstructed scenes of the Greco-Turkish War.

'I was quite unprepared, however, for the marvellous spectacle that was revealed. Here was a key film in the history of the cinema, a "faked" reproduction of a contemporary event, a scene full of movement and originality depicting a life-like naval action on the gundeck of a man-of-war. No wonder a contemporary review referred to it as "wonderfully realistic".

'A gunnery officer is on deck. Five of his team appear one by one as if summoned to action stations. Two enemy shells explode and one of the men is injured. As one sailor attends to the wounded man, the others under the command of their officer fill buckets of water to douse the fire that has broken out.

'The film's most remarkable feature is the vessel's motion, it rocks from side to side: the first articulated set to appear in a film. The set is accurately constructed and painted, and in the background two other ships can be seen. The camera remains static throughout, but the movement of the ship, the action on deck and the explosions make for a very lively scene. It is little wonder that audiences of the day took it for an actual event. The NFA 35mm print is remarkably good and appears reasonably complete.'

In December, Mme Madeleine Malthête-Méliès came to London from Paris to examine her grandfather's lost film. The intrigue, meanwhile, had further deepened when a Canadian expert, Suzanne Richard, had independently of John Barnes also



The Méliès discovery, *Combat Naval en Grèce*.

questioned the NFA's catalogue attribution: in another Méliès film, *Entre Calais et Douvre* (1897), she noticed a set strikingly similar to that used in *Action on Deck of Warship*. At the suggestion of Michelle Aubert, the Archive's Deputy Curator, *Entre Calais et Douvre* and *Action on Deck of Warship* were compared on the same viewing bench and a frame count—23 frames one way, 4 horizontal, 24 the other way—was taken of the ship's rocking movement. In both films they were identical.

DELHI

Saikia, Sen, Shaji and Aravindan

The Delhi Festival dropped its competition section this year, and thereby encouraged a furious debate. Mrs Urmilla Gupta, the Director, had done so because of the impossibility of mounting a meaningful event so soon before Berlin, and because the selling opportunities in India further discouraged good entries. Others, however, missed the Golden Peacock and felt India deserved, at least once every two years, the glamour of an awards ceremony.

Whatever the result of the debate, the 1989 festival took place under the shadow of one of the worst years in the long history of Indian cinema. Although the number of films launched was still huge (around 750), the commercial sector, beleaguered by heavy government taxes, by video piracy and by the expansion of television, had few hits and an inordinate number of

flops. And the Parallel Cinema, fostered at each festival by a Panorama of its latest wares, seems also to be in decline, with many of its best directors giving up the struggle to get their films shown in cinemas and concentrating instead on less challenging work for television.

This year's Panorama, in fact, was the weakest in memory, with very few films on display that could possibly be considered for international audiences. Mira Nair's phenomenally successful *Salaam Bombay!* was there, though, and received a much more mixed reception than at Cannes last year. Some thought it a typical 'export' film, not above a certain calculated appeal to the western conscience. But Mira Nair, who now lives in New York with her American husband, had expected such a reaction.

The best totally new film on view was Bhabendranath Saikia's *Kolahal* (*The Turmoil*) from Assam. This is a simple, direct and honest tale of a deserted wife whose only child is killed in an accident and who refuses at first to eat the rice left for her by the offending lorry-driver, and then to contemplate the advances of a good man who attempts to come to her aid. There is a very fine performance from Runo Devi Thakur, an amateur, in the leading role, and Saikia's film has both a touching sympathy for the woman's plight and a cinematic skill that is subtler than it might appear.

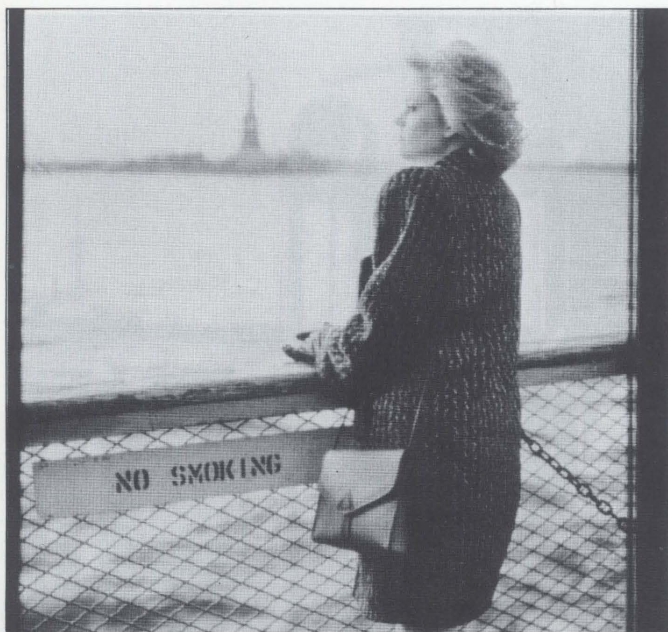
Fortunately, foreign delegates were given some private screenings of films completed too late for the Panorama which suggested there is still some general quality about. The most surpris-

ing was Mrinal Sen's new film, *Ek Din Achanak* (*Suddenly One Day*) set within a Calcutta family whose head, a retired professor, has suddenly gone missing, causing first consternation and then suspicion all round. It turns out that he has simply given up on life and disappeared, believing himself to be a fraud and a mountebank, despite his public reputation. The extraordinary thing is that Sen makes it painfully clear that the man could be himself, or any of us. Though there were no subtitles to aid the western viewer, the film is clearly one of his most provoking essays in self-criticism; and one of his best crafted.

Lastly, there were two superbly shot films from Kerala from the Aravindan stable. Shaji, Aravindan's cameraman, made a stunning debut as director with *Piravi* (*The Birth*), using the beautiful Kerala countryside almost as a character in his story about an old man who waits by the village bus stop for his son to return from Trivandrum, only to become dimly aware that something has happened to him. In fact, he has been murdered by the police after a student protest. There is a superb performance from Premji, an 82-year-old veteran, as the central character.

Aravindan himself, this time with Shaji behind the camera, contributed *Marattam* (*Masquerade*), by some way the most beautiful and convincing summation of Kathakali singing, dancing and poetry to reach the screen. Both these Kerala films, and of course Sen's, deserve to be picked up by other festivals.

DEREK MALCOLM



Working Girl: Melanie Griffith.

SLAVES OF MANHATTAN

Mike Nichols on an immigrant's dream

It begins, as do most Mike Nichols movies, with a journey. Behind the opening credits of *Working Girl*, Tess McGill (Melanie Griffith) is among the huddled masses of commuters streaming off the Staten Island ferry to begin their working day in Manhattan. She's also burdened with the night-school books that she hopes will be her passport out of the secretarial pool of a large brokerage firm. Perhaps her journey reproduces in miniature that of seven-year-old Nichols, then Michael Igor Peschkowsky, when he arrived with his parents in 1938 from Nazi Germany.

'When I started working on the script of *Working Girl*, the most important thing to me was the combination of immigrant and slave ship image. The slaves, as always, are imported from somewhere else—because nobody can afford to live in Manhattan—and then there's the idea of the underground railroad, when Tess' friend at the end leaps up in joy, because "one of us" made it out. But the key was the immigrants, and the immigrant's ear: immigrants develop a very keen ear for what is happening; they have to learn what's happening very fast and sound like *that*. The Statue of Liberty, and the ferry, and the city of Oz aspect of it was what I started with, that and defining the class barrier in a sort of Shavian way.

'You have to know your central image. I couldn't have made

Silkwood if I didn't know it was about waking up. If I didn't know that my story was in every scene *Silkwood* waking up, and trying to wake others, I couldn't have told the story. But I also think of a movie as a journey of discovery, and I don't like to plan everything. E. L. Doctorow said, to my astonishment, though I recognised it when he said it, that he starts by writing the first sentence, and after about four sentences he discovers who's speaking, then in about two pages he discovers whether the person speaking is a major or a minor character. I realised while shooting *Working Girl* that, more often than not, Melanie Griffith was down and Sigourney Weaver was up, Melanie was on her knees and Sigourney was standing, Melanie was fixing her boot... I'm very happy when that comes out of the events, and our journey while we're making it.'

Does Tess McGill's passage perhaps also echo that of an earlier Nichols protagonist, Dustin Hoffman's innocent in a rush, the graduate anxious to solve his future? Dustin's character's motion is really from passive to active, from thing to person, which I think was characteristic of something that was happening in our country then. But it is quite different, because at that time "upward mobility" was a completely impossible thing to attempt, it was so humiliating, the only acceptable option was to move down. Now we've dispensed with all those moral inhibitions, there's just sideways, down and up. The Wall Street firms are going to the colleges to drag the A students into them at \$50,000 a year. And they're burned out in four years. That to me was the significance of the

last shot, of Tess in her own office at last but surrounded in this building by dozens of identical offices. To my mind, it was like the end of *Ikiru*, it was "and look what a small toehold it was". Perfectly legitimate, absolutely necessary to be won, but small, modest.

'I suspect, though, that Tess is so deeply democratic and gentle that she wouldn't stay in that world at all. I'd hope there was far more future for her than Benjamin because she and Jack Trainer (Harrison Ford) have the real beginning of a life together. We improvised that scene at the end where they're making breakfast; I had to have that scene because it was physically about their equalness and their meshing with one another. When you're starting your professional life, as Tess is, one of the crucial events is that you meet someone august, so-called important, and you look at that person and you think, is that all? No big deal, I can do that. That's a very important and unavoidable step in moving up. But the fact that Trainer is in trouble, and she discovers that and reassures him, is the beginning of several things. One is her confidence, and the other is her falling in love with him, because they have a dream of equalness. And that absolute equalness—if it's not measure for measure it won't work—is my dream.'

RICHARD COMBS

SKILL SEARCH

A training map for the 90s?

Skill Search, a research programme launched in January, aims to answer three sets of questions. What is the current employment structure in Britain's film, television and video industries? What are the key economic, technological and organisational trends affecting employment and skills? Which skills are likely to be in short supply or in surplus in future?

This ambitious programme is sponsored by the BBC, Channel 4, the ITV Association, the British Film and Television Producers' Association and the Independent Programme Producers' Association. The steering committee includes representatives from ACTT, BETA and the BFI, and the research itself is being carried out by the Institute of Manpower studies, an independent national organisation based at the University of Sussex.

Given the size of the industry, there is a remarkable shortage of employment data. The industry is not identified in the official statistics, and information about it and its component parts is

often incomplete,' said Carol Varlaam, IMS research fellow. 'We just don't know how many people actually work in it. We are seeking information through interrelated surveys of companies, employees and freelances. The industry's fragmentation and its many freelance staff makes the research particularly challenging. We shall send out 10,000 questionnaires, followed up by a number of interviews.'

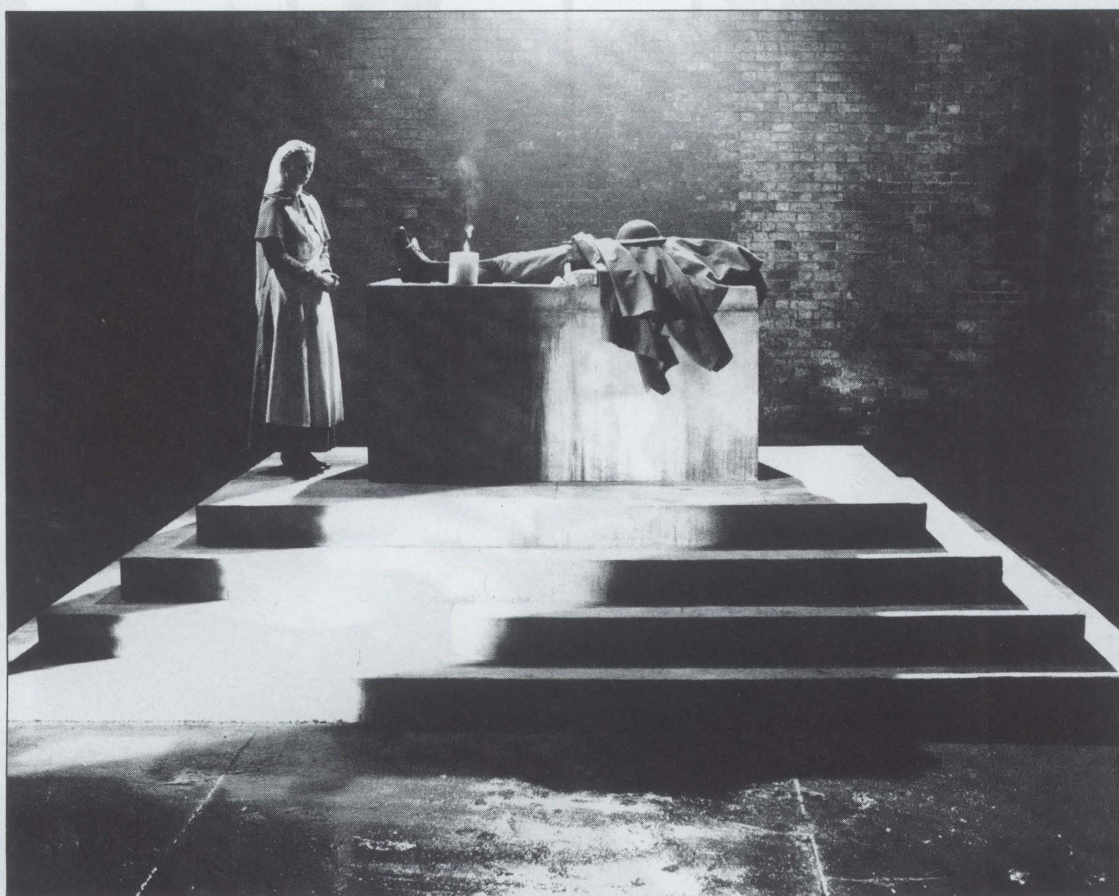
The pace of change within the film, television and video industry has made the question of training urgent. 'In the past, the bulk of training was carried out by the BBC, the major ITV companies and bodies such as Jobfit,' said Richard Pearson, Deputy Director of IMS. 'But with structural changes in the industry, and in particular the rise of the independent producer, will this continue to be the case?'

Paul Styles of the IPPA maintained that independent producers have contributed to training through Jobfit and various regional schemes, though these are small compared to those of the major broadcasters. 'Local schemes are important and will become more so if we see a growth in local production. But it is vital to set national standards for training—the last thing one wants to see is the growth of a two-tier labour market, with an imbalance of skills between London and the rest of Britain.'

'It may not be very popular to talk about public funding at the moment, but without it we can't raise EEC finance for training schemes. Perhaps we should also think about extending the television levy and setting up a centralised training scheme. We should also consider forming alliances with the new bodies now entering the broadcasting arena, since even the satellite operators will eventually come to see the need for proper training.'

Clearly, the industry cannot rely for ever on a pool of skilled labour trained originally by the BBC or the ITV companies, especially at a time of technological change when skills risk being rapidly outmoded. As Sue Davis, training adviser of the rrv Association, noted, 'Even if some of the rrv companies cease to exist in their present form, there will still be a broadcasting system and there will still be production companies, and they will still need trained people if they are to carry on making programmes.' Or, as Frank McGettigan, Director and General Manager of Channel 4, summed up, 'What is at stake in the future of training is the future of production itself.'

JULIAN PETLEY



A DON BOYD PRODUCTION OF A DEREK JARMAN FILM

WAR REQUIEM

GALA PRESENTATION: BERLIN FILM FESTIVAL, FEBRUARY 1989

SAN FRANCISCO FILM FESTIVAL: MARCH 1989

"Jarman's finest achievement"
(Philip French, *THE OBSERVER*)

"Never can a musical piece of such magnitude
have been translated so powerfully into another medium"
(John Coldstream, *THE DAILY TELEGRAPH*)



Days of Eclipse.

soviet сiнema into the

In this exclusive report, ANDREI PLAKHOV, Secretary of the Film-makers' Union of the USSR and Chairman of the Conflict Commission, surveys the field of contemporary Soviet cinema, from box-office winners through forthcoming productions to the legacy of lost works now being shown for the first time.

1986 brought the spirit of radical change to Soviet cinema. The fifth congress of film-makers signified the end of one stage and the beginning of another. The bureaucratic methods of running the film industry, the ideological 'witch-hunts', the bans on films considered to be objectionable, and the privileges given to a small group of semi-official directors all became things of the past.

The Conflict Commission, set up by a decision of the congress, recommended, in the course of 1986 and 1987, the release of more than a hundred films of all kinds which had previously been shelved. These were widely shown in the Soviet Union and many of them represented the Soviet cinema at international festivals. Among the most important revelations of the 'unknown Soviet cinema' are Kira Muratova's *Short Meetings* and *Long Farewells*, Iurii Il'enko's *A Spring for the Thirsty*, Aleksandr Alov and Vladimir Naumov's *A Nasty Story* (from a story by Dostoevskii), and the feature and documentary films of Aleksandr Sokurov. Earlier, two films whose release had been long delayed, Gleb Panfilov's *The Theme* and Aleksei German's *Road-check*, had finally been screened. Boris Frumin, who is now working abroad, returned to Lenfilm to reconstruct his film *The Mistakes of Youth*.

As chairman of the Conflict Commission, I consider that the basic settling of accounts with the past, which began with the battle for Tengiz Abuladze's anti-Stalinist film *Repentance*, was concluded towards the end of 1987, when the fate of Aleksandr Askol'dov's *The Commissar* and Andrei Mikhalkov-Konchalovskii's *The Story of Asia Kliachina*, which had lain on the shelf



Below: *The Story of Asia Kliachina*.

for over twenty years, was successfully resolved.

It was precisely these films that were most popular in the West in 1988, but in fact they represent the culmination of the period of transition during which interest in the Soviet cinema was directed towards the hidden spiritual capital that had been accumulating during the years of stagnation. Now, however, both Soviet and foreign audiences, press and critics are asking the same question ever more frequently: how has *perestroika* been reflected in the contemporary Soviet cinema, has it brought new names, has it opened up new creative perspectives?

The first reaction to the new situation came from the documentary cinema. It was the documentarists who first addressed themselves to a series of formerly 'closed' problems linked to ecology and Chernobyl, to drug-taking and prostitution, who first showed on screen the activities of corrupt 'mafioso' groups and the opposition which the process of *glasnost* and democratisation is experiencing in various institutions and in the local party apparatus. It is indicative in this context that the Conflict Commission encountered attempts to impose new bans precisely on documentary films, because of the sharpness of their analysis of social problems.

The Latvian director Juris Podnieks' *Is It Easy to Be Young?* was extremely successful in the Soviet Union. It offered a broad social portrait of the young generation, and showed the complex and problematic nature of the choices they face in life. This was one of those rare occasions when people queued to see a documentary. *Supreme*

Left: *Long Farewells*.



Court, directed by the older Latvian Gerts Frank, also provoked considerable discussion. Frank managed to follow with documentary precision the process of moral regeneration experienced by a criminal who had been condemned to death.

The Latvian documentary school has long been famous in the Soviet Union. But the renaissance of documentary, on a scale not experienced since the 1920s, since the time of Dziga Vertov, has also spread to the studios of the Ukraine, Belorussia, the Volga region, the Urals and Siberia. The difficult socio-psychological consequences of the Afghan War, an issue first raised by Podnieks, became the central theme of *Pain*, by the Belorussian director Sergei Luk'ianchikov and of *The Return*, by the Muscovite Tat'iana Chubakova. The Ukrainian film *That's the Way We Live* caused a sensation through its interview with a group of Kiev school-boys who professed the ideology and sported the paraphernalia of Nazism.

Two full-length documentaries have recently been completed at Mosfilm, a studio which usually shoots only features. In *Solovki Power* [its very title, *Vlast' solovetskaiia*, is a daring play on the words *Soviet power*, *Vlast' sovetskaiia*, tr.] the experienced director Marina Goldovskaia offers a detailed examination of the mechanism of mass repression, and of the tragic fate of former inmates of the camps on the Solovki islands. Georgii Gavrillov's *Confession, A Chronicle of Alienation* follows the fate of a drug addict over an extended period. It is critical of society's reaction to this problem and of the anti-humanitarian practices of psychiatric hospitals.

In short, it is apparent that Soviet documentary cinema is drawing a picture of a society that is discovering whole layers of painful problems, a society that is alarmed and at times bewildered, but which is overcoming the difficulties on the path to democratisation and *glasnost*. It is important to note that most of those I have mentioned are new, young names—this is true of Podnieks and Luk'ianchikov, of Chubakova and Gavrillov. One should also mention the strong group of Leningrad documentarists. Valerii Naumov has made an interesting film about the painter Filonov, and Igor' Alimpiev about the poet Gumilev. These figures from the Russian cultural past were previously subject to a semi-ban. Films are now being made about the guitar poet Aleksandr Galich and other émigrés. Several films have been made about Vladimir Vysotskii.

In Belorussia, the film that encountered most opposition was *The Theatre in the Period of Glasnost and Perestroika*, by the young director Arkadii Ruderman. It addresses itself to the sensitive issue of the republic's treatment of the work of Marc Chagall and his attitude to Belorussian culture (Chagall was born in the Belorussian town of Vitebsk). The film has been accused of 'aggravating the Jewish

question', though in fact it is concerned with something completely different, the ways in which the bureaucracy attempts to propagate old ideological stereotypes.

In the area of features, it was only at the end of 1987 and in 1988 that the first films actually produced in the conditions of *perestroika* began to make their way to the screen. Among them I would single out two which seem to show the contrasting sociological and existential and philosophical paths being followed by the new Soviet cinema.

The first, *Little Vera*, offers a sarcastic portrait of a Soviet working-class family in thrall to consumerism and oblivious to elementary moral norms. Initially it might seem that the makers of the film are interested in the traditional conflict between fathers and sons. In fact, however, both sides are

observed in the context of the general social atmosphere in an industrial town where the spiritual development of man has been crushed and ignored.

Little Vera marks the cinematic debut of the director Vasilii Pichul' and his wife, the screenwriter Mariia Khmelik. It represented the Soviet cinema successfully at Montreal, Venice and Chicago in 1988 and was awarded several prizes. At Venice it was shown in the critics' week alongside Mike Leigh's *High Hopes*, with which it shared the FIPRESCI prize. It is interesting to note that the issues raised by the films are largely similar, that they both combine a sociological approach with elements of the grotesque, and that there is even a connection between their ironic titles. In Russian the name Vera means faith, which is not very far from hope. For all the biting sarcasm of the treatment of the heroes, neither author considers his characters monsters: the screen is

Below: *Little Vera*. Bottom: *Is It Easy to Be Young?*



suffused with sympathy for their 'little faith' and their 'high hopes'.

Professional critics, both within the Soviet Union and abroad, greeted *Little Vera* as a sign of the renewal of the thematics and the style of Soviet cinema, as a witness to its greater inner freedom. It must be added, however, that the wide interest the film aroused among Soviet audiences was provoked by the sensational frankness of its single erotic scene, a scene which almost got the film banned. In essence, the film's structure is that of the traditional love story. It can be read as a paraphrase of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Whatever the reason, *Little Vera* was the box-office winner in 1988, just as a year earlier Karen Shakhnazarov's 1987 Moscow Film Festival prizewinner *Messenger Boy* had packed cinemas. Initial returns suggest that fewer people than expected have been seeing Iurii Kara's *Thieves in the Law*, despite

its sensational theme of corruption within the state apparatus of power and an abundance of exceptionally violent scenes. Critics were agreed in finding it kitsch and time-serving.

The other film which I see as symptomatic of new tendencies in Soviet cinema was made by the Leningrad director Aleksandr Sokurov. This still young director (born in 1951) has already displayed a rare energy and rare gifts: during his few years working in the cinema he has managed to make more than ten films; and, moreover, until the fifth congress of film-makers not one of them had been allowed to reach the screen. His new film, *Days of Eclipse*, is the first that he has been able to shoot under normal conditions, and the first to be shown and advertised on a wide scale.

The screenplay is based on a fantastic tale by the Strugatskii brothers, considerably reworked by the director and his

regular co-author, Iurii Arabov. The fantastic world has been transferred to contemporary Soviet reality, to the sands of Central Asia, in which eastern exoticism, the marks of technical civilisation and elements of existential absurdity combine to create an atmosphere and a landscape that are almost comic. The film shows signs of the director's social engagement. It appears to contain echoes of the Afghan war and the problems of the deported peoples, the Crimean Tatars and the Soviet Germans. But all this seems to be the occasion for a meditation on the theme of masculine solitude, homelessness and banishment, the impossibility of self-identification.

Sokurov is considered to be a follower of Andrei Tarkovskii. If that is so, then *Days of Eclipse* is both his *Mirror* and his *Nostalgia*, and moreover the mirror of nostalgia is turned to the east, where the film's lost heroes try to find love and a place to call home, but understand that it is impossible. In my view, however, Sokurov has never been an imitator of Tarkovskii and his development as an artist has been completely independent. Which does not exclude the fact that by its very nature authorial cinema, to which Sokurov is committed, suggests allusions to the great masters—not only to Tarkovskii, but also to Eisenstein. It is worth remarking that Sokurov is the only inheritor among the young directors of the traditions of authorial style and montage of Soviet cinema of the 1920s. Sokurov is already finishing his next film, which is to be a free adaptation of *Madame Bovary*. It has been commissioned by the newly founded Videofilm organisation, which sometimes sponsors unusual and non-commercial projects.

Other already completed films worth mentioning include *My Name Is Arlecchino* by Valerii Rybarev, a director working in Belorussia; the Azerbaidzhani *The Scoundrel* by Vagif Mustafaeu; the Georgian *Anaemia* by Temo Kotetishvili; the Estonian *Birdwatcher* by Arvo Iho; the Moldavian

Below: *Days of Eclipse*. Bottom: *The Messenger Boy*.



The Dissident by Valerii Zhiregi; and Vladimir Khotinenko's *A Mirror for the Hero* and *The Husband and Daughter of Tamara Aleksandrovna* by Ol'ga Narutskaya (both from screenplays by the interesting new playwright Ol'ga Kozhushannaia). All these films are socio-psychological dramas, sometimes with an excursion into the past and on occasion with elements of the grotesque; all were made by relatively young directors, and for several this was their first film. All these films have already provoked interest and discussion, as no doubt will several others which have not yet reached the screen.

Screen versions of famous literary works form another group among the new films. In *Ashik Kerib*, Sergei Parazhdanov takes motifs from the work of Mikhail Lermontov and transforms them into screen painting. Once again he demonstrates his unique visionary gifts and his knowledge of eastern ethnography and folklore. The East also provides the setting for Kira Muratova's *Change of Fortune*: Muratova shot on location in Tadzhikistan, which stood in as a sort of surrogate for the Singapore of Somerset Maugham's *The Letter*, which was the basis for Muratova's screenplay. This is clearly a transitional work, and in her next film Muratova will return to her familiar genre of the 'provincial melodrama'. Three screen versions of Russian nineteenth-century classics are awaited with interest. The Georgian Georgii Shengelaia is to make Tolstoi's *Khadzhi Murat*, the Armenian Roman Balaian will make Leskov's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*; and the Leningrad director Sergei Ovcharov is to bring Saltykov-Shchedrin to the screen.

The interests of the majority of directors of the Soviet 'new wave' lie at the junction of culturology and unusual genre experiments. Ivan Dykhovichnyi, Aleksandr Kaidanovskii and Konstantin Lopushanskii, as well as Sokurov, can be ranked as inheritors of the artistic ideas of Tarkovskii. Their work bears clear signs of his influence, but also of a striving to overcome it. Dykhovichnyi's *The Black Monk*, based on Chekhov's story, was shown in competition at Venice in 1988. It combines elegance of spectacle with a subtle musicality which takes the film into a wider sphere of cultural associations. Lopushanskii, after his apocalyptic vision of the future in *Letters from a Dead Man*, is now preparing an ecological parable. Kaidanovskii, who played the leading role in Tarkovskii's *Stalker*, has plunged energetically into direction and has already made highly individual versions of Borges, Camus and Tolstoi. None of his films has had a commercial release, since they are made in black and white, for little money, and with cheap technical equipment. All this adds to the sense of expectation around Kaidanovskii's *The Kerosene Man's Wife*. The first of his films to be made from an original screenplay, it concerns the political reality of the Stalin period, observed through a mixture

of tragic farce, detective story and melodrama.

The problem of genre is a central concern of contemporary Soviet film-makers. *Perestroika* has rehabilitated authorial, experimental cinema, while at the same time raising the issue of the introduction of self-financing into the film industry. For this reason, every studio is trying to make commercially profitable films which can compete with films from abroad.

The most successful and profitable Soviet films used to be traditional, apolitical melodramas and comedies, detective stories and adventure films. Now novel and even sensational themes have become just as important a factor in determining box-office success. El'dar Riazanov, an acknowledged master at producing undemanding box-office hits, now intends to bring to the screen *The Life and Extraordinary Adventures of Private Ivan Chonkin*, by the émigré writer Vladimir Voinovich, whose work remained banned in the Soviet Union until the end of last year.

Until recently, a Soviet public could be guaranteed for a not very enterprising version of a novel by Agatha Christie. That is precisely what Stanislav Govorukhin made in *Ten Little Niggers*. But now this very same ideologist of the commercial cinema and opponent of elitism is making a film about the Stalin period, about the camps and the repression. This newly discovered theme is directly or indirectly apparent in Aleksandr Proshkin's 'Western' *The Cold Summer of 1953*, in Karen Shakhnazarov's *The Town of Zero*, and in Evgenii Tsymbal's debut film *Sedov, Counsel for the Defence*. And Petr Todorovskii, while remaining faithful to the genre of melodrama, is making his new film, *Freken Tanya*, about the problem of emigration and the hard-currency prostitutes who offer

their services to foreigners. El'er Ishmukhamedov has made *Shock*, a political thriller about the crimes of the Uzbek government mafia.

The popular cinema is being transformed both thematically and in terms of genre. *The Fountain*, by the Leningrad director Iurii Mamin, is a social comedy of a sharpness and relevance far beyond what audiences had come to expect in the films of Riazanov, who previously set standards in this area. Another young Leningrad director, Oleg Teptsov, has made *The Decorator*, one of the first attempts at a Soviet thriller. The film is a sort of mystic drama set in the period of Russian Decadence, in the early twentieth century. Teptsov has managed to capture on screen the mystical atmosphere in Petersburg during the white nights, to make a film that is simultaneously intellectual and entertaining. The same kind of effect is aimed at both by the young Kazakh film-maker Rashid Nugmanov, whose *The Needle* is concerned with drug-taking and the rock culture of young people; and by the experienced Muscovite director Sergei Solov'ev. Also from a starting point of material from rock culture, Solov'ev has tried to bring some experiment into the area of popular cinema in his 'postmodern' collage-film *Assa*. He is now completing another genre experiment, to be called *Black Rose of Sadness, Red Rose of Love*.

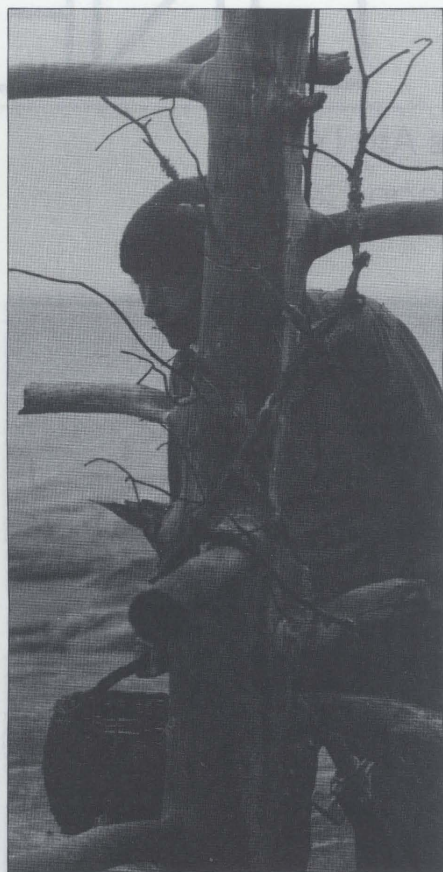
There has been much discussion about the state of the cinema in the Soviet Union during the last three years. It seems to have led to the conclusion that both branches of the cinematic tree, popular films and authorial films, must be developed, and that it will do no harm at all if these two branches become entangled. Soviet film-makers have founded two new international festivals in an attempt to stimulate developments in both areas. One took

Below: *Ashik Kerib*. Below right: *The Black Monk*.



place for the first time in 1988 in Odessa, and was devoted to popular cinema. The other, in Riga, showed a rich selection of experimental and avant-garde films. At the Riga festival, named Arsenal, representatives of the Soviet 'parallel cinema' participated for the first time in the shape of the independent Ciné-fantôme group, which should be considered as the extreme of the avant-garde.

In the area of authorial cinema, the Tadjik director Bako Sadykov's *Waterspout*, based on a story by Chingiz Aitmatov, is awaited with great interest. This director has already provoked attention with short films that



are somewhat reminiscent of the spirit of Paradzhanov. The new film by the Georgian director Aleksandr Rekhviashvili promises to be as significant and absolutely original as all his other work. The news that Rustam Khamdamov, whose career was interrupted more than ten years ago, has started work at Mosfilm has caused a sensation. He made a brilliant debut with a short film in 'retro' style and began shooting on *The Slave of Love*, a project that was then handed over to Nikita Mikhalkov. Khamdamov's new film is being made from his own screenplay.

Of the major directors, the 'stars', only Vadim Abdrashitov is working quickly and solidly. He has just finished *The Servant*, once again on a provocative contemporary theme. As for the others, the situation is more complicated. Most are spending much time and care nurturing new projects, as if they were afraid of making a false move. The process of preparing a new project has become more complicated and more time-consuming in the new conditions, because the greater creative freedom forces artists to rid themselves of self-censorship, of their customary recourse to euphemism and Aesopian language, and brings them face to face with the temptations of a new kind of time-serving.

It is probably a mixture of these reasons that has led to a delay in the choice of a subject by such directors as Aleksei German and Georgii Danelia, El'dar Shengelaia and Tengiz Abuladze. Elem Klimov is working on two projects at the same time, a screen version of Bulgakov's novel *The Master and Margarita* and a feature-documentary about Stalin and Stalinism. Gleb Panfilov has amazed many of his admirers by setting up a large-scale production based on Gor'kii's novel *The Mother*, as if to emphasise his desire not to follow the dictates of fashion.

There is one other new factor that can

influence the moves made by leading Soviet directors, the possibility of working on co-productions with western companies. Formerly this chance existed only for a small group of semi-official directors, but now the idea of international co-production in one form or another has been embraced by filmmakers of all generations and all creative persuasions. Panfilov and Balaian, Dykhovichnyi and Georgii Shengelaia are all making use of technical assistance from Italian, West German and other foreign companies. Tolomush Okeev intends to make an international co-production about Genghis Khan, and Ali Khamraev about Tamberlaine. Iraklii Kvirikadze is working with a French company, and Sergei Solov'ev is setting up a screen version of Bulat Okudzhava's *Meetings with Bonaparte* with an American company.

The work of the Mikhalkov brothers and of Otar Iosseliani has come to be considered as a special case. Iosseliani has been abroad for some time and is completing a new production which was partly filmed in Africa. After *Dark Eyes*, which was greeted with critical scepticism in the Soviet Union (unlike the western response), Nikita Mikhalkov has plunged headlong into work on *The Barber of Siberia*, in which he hopes to star Meryl Streep. His brother Andrei Mikhalkov-Konchalovskii has already made a number of films in Hollywood, but he has not broken his ties with Russia and intends to bring to fruition his long cherished project of a Soviet-American film about Sergei Rachmaninov.

This enthusiasm for co-productions and foreign contracts has provoked a lively discussion in the Soviet press. People are putting forward arguments both for and against. But it is obvious that what we are seeing is a perfectly natural process, stimulated on the one hand by the removal of the cultural 'iron curtain', and on the other by the imperfect technical base of the Soviet film industry, the lack of good quality film stock and equipment.

It is easy to understand the Soviet directors: for the first time in their lives they have the chance to try out their skills and work in economic, ideological and creative conditions that are utterly new and unfamiliar. The new possibilities have also provoked the interest of their western partners, who know the intellectual and creative potential of Soviet directors. So that it is possible that for all the difficulties, contradictions and costs which co-production entails, the very concept of international cinematic co-operation is now entering a completely new stage. Perhaps the cinema will reach its centenary not divided by regional and political barriers, but conscious that it is the most international of all the arts, the common language and beautiful dream of humanity. ■

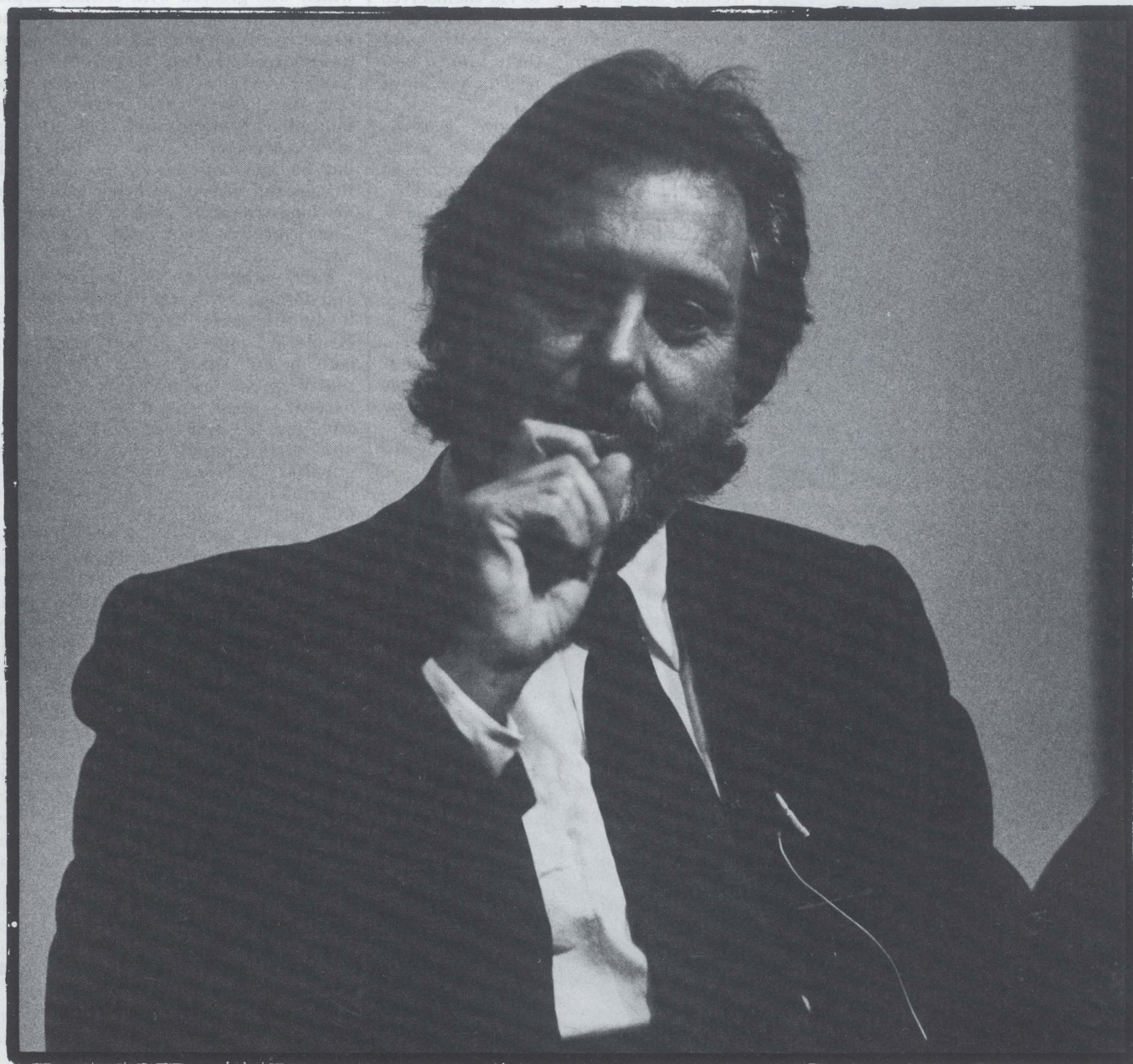


Left: *Birdwatcher*.

Translated by Julian Graffy. The transliteration system employed is that now used by British Slavic journals.

ART AND THE BOTTOM LINE

An edited version of the Financial Times Arts Lecture
given by **DAVID PUTTNAM** at the Barbican Centre
on 30 November 1988



Photograph: Sten M. Rosenlund.

First, a word about our sponsor. Newspaper ownership in Britain has significantly changed hands in the last two decades. The Lords Kemsley, Camrose and Beaverbrook have gone and so, finally, has Fleet Street itself: at least as a street of ink. The passing of newspaper empires is probably as natural as Darwinism, and equally difficult to argue. But, amid all this change, the *Financial Times* has come to seem something of a 'safe house' for much of what's best in British journalism.

And, God knows, we would be foolish to take such safe houses for granted if we are to have any hope of retaining those qualities we value in both journalism and the arts. In fact, we should cherish any remaining enclave in which truth, accuracy, weight and balance continue to be respected for their own sake. As a further safeguard, we must also frequently remind ourselves that our notion of the freedom of ideas is relatively young in the sweep of history—and still by no means universally practised or accepted.

Being a film-maker, I would like to offer an image that serves well as just such a reminder. It involves Robert Hughes, the author and art critic for *Time* magazine.

A few months ago, Hughes found himself savouring the glories of Lenin-grad. Having been overwhelmed by the sheer scale and riches of the Hermitage, he wanders down the Nevsky Prospekt and seeks out what's called the 'Russian Museum'. Here he discovers a volume and quality of native Russian art that is almost as daunting as that at the Hermitage. Eventually the new director of the Museum—a post-*glasnost* appointee elected by the staff—takes Hughes through a maze of corridors and stairs. At the end is a revelation: an immense treasure trove of Russian modernist paintings, work which had been kept from public gaze—kept out of sight by a long-imposed cultural ideology.

Hughes reports: 'There they all are, the heroes and heroines of the first forty years of this century, their works propped against one another, leaning casually against walls, stuffed in racks—early Chagall, Malevich, Kandinsky, Klyun, Rodchenko... an entire culture frozen by Stalinism, like a mammoth in an ice bog...' What an appalling commentary on the whims, caprice and terror of patronage. A cultural dungeon, in a city itself created by patronage.

I want here to consider patronage and patrons... the contemporary role of patronage, how it shapes our work, the work of artists and communicators, and offer some cautionary tales.

Who are the great patrons of today? In most instances they are the media empires and the multinational corporations. Every major film studio, every television network and—increasingly

today—many of the major book publishers fall under this financial system. This must be qualified, and in part explained, by a sense of scale. Cinema, television, architecture, newspaper publishing, commercial theatre and much of today's literature are costly undertakings. More and more they fall only within the financial means of global baronies. Minnows can survive at the fringes, but the mainstream of almost any art or communication form today depends for its patronage on these baronies. In such a system, artistic freedom finds itself limited by, and frequently colliding with, primarily economic demands. As a result, its true purpose is diverted or degraded, usually by that corporate discipline uncomfortably known as the bottom line.

My own most recent patron was a powerful global barony. And I should make it quite clear that I see nothing inconsistent in the partnership of an international soft-drink empire and a Hollywood studio. Obviously, had I done so, I would not have taken on the chairmanship of Columbia Pictures. There was, I believed, even an elegant synergy. I had for years dreamed of helping American cinema out of its parochial cast of mind. It seemed to me (and it appeared that the Coca-Cola Company felt the same way) that, just as Coke was an international taste, it was also profoundly true that film was an international language.

I'm not here to lament the end of my partnership with Coca-Cola, I am here to consider some of the lessons that experience engraved on my heart. One is about trust. The artist is a credulous animal. He is often a dreamer. And if he finds someone who appears to share his dream or, even better, someone who has the means to realise that dream, then that artist tends to believe in Santa Claus. If this seems a trifle naive, I should say that I prefer naivety to cynicism. The naive have hope: and it has been hope which has allowed me, throughout my career, to find people—patrons—prepared to share my dreams and help me realise them.

But, as the artist has to trust the patron, so the patron must also come to trust the artist. To do that he is required to understand the nature of art. Film, like other art, is far from being a product of invariable quality. In fact, cinema requires that *much* trust be placed in mysterious and sometimes opaque processes. The mystery of film cannot be ordered by a leader, nor mandated by law, nor whistled up as one calls a porter. For the most part, it's an arena probably best left untended by governments, because it resists formula and baffles all attempts to forecast its final impact on audiences.

A tightly controlled product line would appear an impossibility. In fact, guaranteed success of any sort seems highly unlikely, and each of us is forced, from time to time, to face the question

of whether our work can ever *really* be calculated as a tangible asset to any corporate bottom line. And so, conversely, I believe that if you attempt to apply the principles of the product line to an artistic endeavour such as film you will simply find yourself misapplying it. You will be defeated by the elusive laws of success.

Alas, all this serves not only as a warning to patrons, but also to artists. I fear that in many instances film-making has become a conspiracy of insincerity. Insincerity in the artist, settling for a formula considered commercial while claiming higher intent. Insincerity in the patron, promoting the artist's renown while safely knowing that he has already corrupted the flow of the work, the integrity of the individual imagination. And the shameful thing about this conspiracy is that it illustrates not a poverty of imagination but, less forgivable, a poverty of ambition.

As I said, I am not here to retell the case of Puttnam versus Coca-Cola. But I do want to draw lessons from what I found to be the creative environment of the United States. And this is from someone whose early dreams were shaped by American film, when American film seemed to glow with ideals, and from someone who has seen, at first hand, America's vast, if frequently misused, resources of talent. In fact, the real tragedy is that so much talent and so much wealth is squandered on the relentlessly second-rate.

I think this tragedy begins with a timidity of mind, a kind of intellectual avoidance. For example, it has become in America today hard to find open and honest debate. The sheer joy of the clash of ideas seems to have lapsed into disuse, and that cannot happen without collusion from an intellectual community which, by definition, includes the artist.

We have recently seen the contest for the political leadership of the western world resolved, in large part, on the television screen. What were called presidential debates were purged of any of the normal risk of real discussion—spontaneity, discovery, passion. I quote Abe Rosenthal, a former editor of the *New York Times*: 'The American people are being manipulated into making up their minds on the basis of material almost at the intellectual level of children's cartoons.' And if that is true of the most fundamental political discourse, it also expresses something else, a kind of mute complicity in avoiding issues, in evading truths. There is a fear of the single raised voice—a fear I saw at first-hand, all too evident, around the boardroom table.

It's a paralysing force. And since the artist in history often carries the responsibility of that single raised voice—or, as a film-maker, finds himself drawn to the single raised voice as a subject—this should be a development



I've learnt about my social responsibility from the audience's reaction to my work, and sometimes that knowledge has been uncomfortable.

viewed with deep concern by all of us. This is not intended to be another condescending British view of American values, of the American polity, American TV, American journalism, or even of American film. The truth is, we, the communicators, are *all* culpable, artist and journalist alike, for having allowed a process of patronage to take over the delivery systems of our work without holding our ground.

Essentially, this contemporary process of patronage is a concentration of media power on a scale never before seen, or even seriously contemplated. At the core of that power is control or ownership of the delivery systems, and it takes more than one form.

Consider the American election. This was essentially a fight to dominate, to control, the most powerful and pervasive delivery system—television. It was a fight between some of the most highly paid skills of our time. Between, on the one side, those of the speechwriter, the image-maker, the packager and simplifier, and, on the other, the skills of the political reporters, the network anchormen, the video editor, the producer. Can anyone honestly dispute who won?

At every turn, by every measure, the political process had passed from being a real, live engagement between opposing candidates and the American people, to becoming a totally synthetic process dictated by people whose principal motive was precisely to remove the candidates and the issues from the electoral process. In fact, to control each day the terms on which the contest was to be fought. This was an alarmingly reductive process. And, as it disengaged the candidates from any significant interaction with the electorate, at least

half that electorate turned its back and played no part.

Is this a vision of our future? Could this reductive process become the underlying truth of our multi-channel destiny? Are we witness to an atomisation of television—creating a cocktail from a combination of multiplicity of choice and market pressures, in such a way as to shake out those financial distortions that for some years have allowed us the privilege of creative integrity in a medium which, throughout most of the world, is a cultural wasteland? The same process that has produced a situation in America whereby you can flip through thirty or more channels, and fail to find anything to challenge the imagination.

This brings me back to my belief in the common cause of the artist and the journalist. I would like to offer this definition of it: does each of us, in our way, describe the world as it really is? Deceptively simple, and yet I'm sure that few newspaper editors and even fewer editors of the television news can retire to bed at night and honestly claim that they've pulled that one off.

But it can be done. I want to cite the example of one of my own rather unsung heroes. In the wake of the First World War, in the infancy of news photography, the photographer Dr Erich Salomon had a novel idea. He felt he knew how wars began, with a few men arguing in a smoke-filled room. Salomon wanted to show statesmen as they really were, informally, in conclave, in conspiracy. With great skill and special equipment he photographed the diplomatic conferences of the 1920s and 30s with an exact and unrelenting fidelity—Mussolini, Goebbels, Hitler, Austen Chamberlain, Neville Chamberlain. Salomon photographed Goebbels lounging alone on a deckchair and, in that innocent setting, caught the man's innate evil. Later Salomon died in one of Hitler's gas chambers.

The *Independent* recently published, side by side, two pictures: one by Salomon, one not. The one not by Salomon was what the old-style press photographer called the 'firing squad' portrait, a carefully grouped and falsely amicable study of statesmen. Salomon's picture was of Ramsay MacDonald and Stanley Baldwin at a press conference, off-guard and each seeming half-dead. This was one man's view of the world as it really was—it left you with a feeling that the earth turned, none too safely, in the care of old men, possibly out of their time. Some might see a kind of sedition in that, but if so it's the sedition of truth, caught in a fragment of time.

I'll cite another example, this time from art looking at journalism—that deceptively light look at the rise of mediocrity in American political commentary, *Broadcast News*, and the words of a character in that film, Aaron Altman: 'What do you think the devil is

The uses of violence: below, *The Killing Fields*; right, *Midnight Express*.



going to look like if he comes around? He will be attractive and he will be nice and helpful and he will get a job where he influences a great godfearing nation and... he will just bit by bit lower standards where they are important. Just coax along flash over substance. Just a tiny bit at a time.' That is precisely how territory is lost, in the physical environment of the rain forest, tree by tree, and in the intellectual environment of our society, compromise by compromise.

Today's is a complex world, and one easy for the artist to back away from, pleading that his job is entertainment, escapism, the provision of public sedatives. I find that excuse insidious. I find that view of entertainment, that it is an alternative to the engagement of the mind, the worst kind of artistic evasion, posing what is, in reality, a false choice. We cannot and must not back away from complexity and, in doing so, render our work simplistic. Similarly, I reject elitism—because it is the elitist who tends to sneer at the idea of entertainment, as though entertainment and serious engagement of the mind are opposing forces.

The problem for the contemporary communicator, for the artist, becomes how he can find the means to respond to a world that constantly seems to overtake his imagination in its horrors and deceptions. I believe in the potency of cinema. I believe in the considerable social role it has to play in our lives. I say this as someone who, as a young man, had his whole view of life and the world and the way it was organised formed by and through the cinema, in that magic atmosphere where people are at their most vulnerable to impressions and to ideas—in darkness. I believe film can uniquely feed people with ideals, mixed with ideas, in a way that possibly no other art form can quite match. As any communicator must, I've learned about my social responsibility from the audience's reaction to my work, and sometimes that knowledge has been uncomfortable.

When we finished making *Midnight Express*, it seemed that we had created a healthily discomfoting balance of truth and art—a truth that it would have been impossible to show in any other way, the hidden truth of life inside a Turkish prison. Then came a shock. I watched that film in a packed cinema. There is a scene in which Billy Hayes bites off the tongue of a fellow prisoner. When we made the film it seemed as powerful a way as any of illustrating just how far the human spirit can descend under those conditions. But in the cinema it had (at least by me) a quite unforeseen effect. Some people were so infected by the cliché of brutal retribution for brutal treatment that they leapt to their feet, cheered and applauded. I was appalled. Ever since, it's made me very cautious about the use of violence in film. It's true that

in *The Killing Fields* we dealt with the far more terrible violence of genocide. But on this occasion nobody, to my knowledge, ever jumped on seats to applaud one side or the other.

The crux of it is this. I cannot accept that the film-maker should in any way conspire to put his work above or outside what he believes to be a decent set of values for his own life, his own family and their future in society. Not only above or outside, but more particularly below. The responsible film-maker may not cheapen his work so that it becomes less than true to the world he himself wishes to inhabit. Yet, at the same time, it's important that he faces up to a broader set of social responsibilities. Nobody else can do that for him. This is not a mandated duty. But to me it is none the less utterly inescapable.

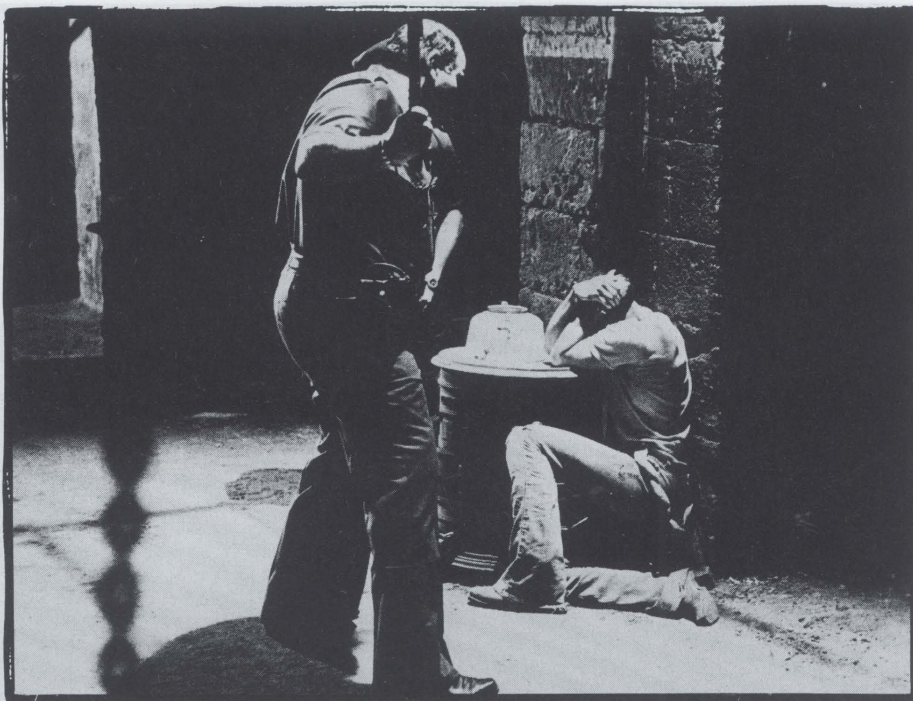
For this reason I am wary of those who wish to view artists and journalists as accomplices to the plagues of our time. I hear in their voices the other face of patronage: imposing the conditions, the rules, and codes under which art and information should operate. Just as Aaron Altman in *Broadcast News* saw the process of professional debasement taking place a tiny bit at a time, so can the advance of the censor steal up on us.

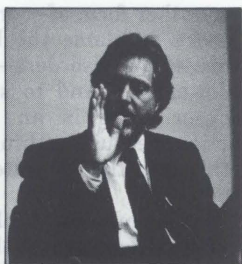
We in the arts, and those who employ us, have to regain a true sense of collective responsibility. No matter what daily horrors the media bring, be it child abuse, child pornography, violence against women, serial killings, attacks on the elderly, these are too often interpreted as evidence of the personal disorders of individuals. We seem, for the moment, to have lost all sense of the social production of such evils. Many people's answer to social aberrations is merely to punish individuals—to bring back the birch or the cat, or hanging, or

any other form of coercion. Or, as a last resort, to blame the bearer of the picture of the disorders—the media or the film-maker. And to summon forth the censor. This is an ill-considered reaction, because nothing is more likely to stimulate the appetite of a Loony Left than the spectre of authoritarian mechanisms put in place by an apparently benign and well-meaning Right. That is why I would infinitely prefer that we police ourselves before others do it for us.

I recognise that anyone who proposes that we police ourselves is, in effect, offering his own work as hostage. When I have attacked films like *Rambo* and all that they represent, I am, quite reasonably, questioned about the violence in my own films—such as *The Killing Fields*, *The Mission*. The difference seems to me to be quite clear. And if I didn't know that difference I could never have attempted the films I have made.

I try to make films about morally accountable individuals, trying to hold true to their beliefs against the mindless violence of ideological genocide or religious fanaticism. What I find offensive in films like *Rambo* is the illusion of another morality, that of an individual facing a complex world with nothing but his own brute force—and prevailing, as though all we have to do for the triumph of moral virtue is to summon up the violent animal impulse that may well exist deep within all of us. The animal element takes control, just as it takes control in the cinema, with the audience aspiring to the same perfect simplicities. And, tragically, it doesn't seem to vanish when the cinema lights come up—it drips, drop by drop, into broader political and ideological attitudes. Witness the random growth of violence in our own society or, more





Good or bad, movies tinker around inside your brain. They steal up on you in the darkness of the cinema.

ominously, the applause from the gallery that greeted the white defendant in New York's Howard Beach racial murder trial, after he had been conclusively found guilty.

At the end of the road every artist must know there is a price to pay. He cannot escape the consequences of his work. It's triumph or it's sell out. He must constantly ask, are we sure we're doing the very best we can?

To try to answer that, I turn, again, to our enablers—the patrons, and to the ownership and control of the delivery systems. That is what the current fight for the soul of television in Britain is really all about. There is a new ecology of media ownership. The baronies—Murdoch, Maxwell, Berlusconi and others—get bigger by the week. And this concentration of media ownership overlaps all too easily into a concentration of film studio ownership. In America, even the distribution of books has become reliant on the commercial judgment of just two major retail chains.

If you think that some of the media moguls are big enough already, consider this. The General Electric Company of America had an income in 1987 of more than forty billion dollars. Out of that forty billion, about nine billion came from defence contracts, and three billion from its ownership of NBC, the most successful of America's three major television networks. GE has made no secret of its ambitions in the international communications business. And, incidentally, was once the sponsor, on American television, of the General Electric Theatre, which is remembered now partly because its host, Ronald Reagan, was able to use it as a platform from which to launch his political career.

Without, I hope, embracing a conspiracy theory, I would like to consider what conflict of interest might arise from this company's ambitions as a multinational media owner. With so much of its income dependent on defence contracts, what is its corporate view likely to be on arms control? How does this corporate mind view the potential for permanent detente, and the gradual disappearance of global conflict as an omni-present threat? To my mind it is entirely proper to make these speculations, these connections, because we have an obligation to be alert to any possible hidden agenda in the ownership of the systems that inform us.

Business does not exist independently of the rest of society, even if it sometimes appears to comfort itself with the illusion that it does. By passing through the lobby of the corporate building, many people find themselves passing through a kind of moral airlock: during those few steps across the lobby they cease to be the person they were in the street and become by stealthy transfiguration the loyal corporate being. They have left behind one kind of integrity—their private preferences of family, friends, stability, continuity—and now, for the portion of their lives spent in this corporate building, they find themselves reluctantly embracing another kind of integrity, the integrity of the bottom line.

This image of the corporate lobby as a moral airlock may be simplistic, but I think many will recognise it. Certainly the writer, the producer, the director all know it only too well. They possibly think they've seen what C. S. Lewis memorably described as: 'The greatest evil... being conceived and ordered... in clean, carpeted and well-lighted offices by quiet men with white collars,

Sustaining quality:

Bill Forsyth's *Housekeeping*, Columbia's first David Puttnam picture.



cut fingernails and smooth-shaven cheeks, who have little need to raise their voice...

Not much place there for our single raised voice. And the point is this. If a community cares only for 'the bottom line', then there can be little community pressure on individuals to behave fairly and honourably. And in a world of bottom lines, why should anyone bother to invest time and energy in the improvement of such an amorphous thing as a soul—or, more crucially, in the truth that only the soul, when alone, admits to.

Then there is the little discussed relationship between the commercial ethic and that of the state within which this ethic works. Is it too much to believe, with Edmund Burke, that 'The state is more than just a trade agreement... it is a partnership in science, art, virtue and perfection...' But I fear that within our state's notion of partnership, art has continued to be treated as a dangerously unequal partner. We rightly congratulate ourselves on an economic recovery. But we forget to enquire about the ethical framework of that recovery, about the virtues, to use Burke's word, that are promoted in order to judge success. It seems to me that an entire generation of young people is in danger of being 'bought off' with politics and promises that may well prove financially irresponsible; are certainly environmentally insupportable, and have the potential to be as socially dangerous as they are divisive.

This brings us back to the danger of a philosophy based solely on the values of the bottom line, and to the kind of patronage that can come to encourage. Fortunately, there are in actuality not one but two kinds of patronage, or at least two levels of patronage: those who own the means of delivery, and, far more numerous, those who produce, who make the films, the programmes.

Perhaps there is a way in which, by preserving the diversity of producers, by securing it, we can, in effect, legislate against the monolithic conformity that threatens to overwhelm us. Film-makers are creative artists who, of necessity, have also to be businessmen. Our patrons quite reasonably expect that of us. Here in Europe there is an interesting pattern to the way we finance our films. More often than not, there is not one patron but a coalition brought together uniquely for one joint endeavour. No single voice holds sway. It can—and it has—worked extraordinarily well. And it tends to grant far more creative freedom, to be far more open to innovation, than the system funded by a single corporation.

Within this coalition of patrons, the film-maker, the creative artist, has an absolute obligation to hold true to his vision. To hold true despite the beguiling and often distracting temptations on

offer to make things easier and more accommodating. The future, though, will bring a stiffer test. If the values and standards of our work are not set by us, but by those who control access to the delivery systems, the diversity of the producers' funding will have made no difference. Everything will be reduced to a concept of minimum risk, reduced once again to the formulas of the bottom line. The new patron saints of society, those who will fund our work, whether as partners of the producers or as the media moguls, must be made to understand their obligations. They, too, must observe the social agenda.

In Britain there has, in the past, been ample evidence of the relationship between the quality of patronage and the quality of work. The BBC is a remarkable example of what politically and commercially disinterested patronage can achieve. But can we really feel as secure as we once could for the continuity of this precious and unique asset?

The American critic and professor of jurisprudence, Ronald Dworkin, wrote recently: 'Those who have loved Britain for its sense of community and political culture will love it less now... artistic achievement has shifted in a direction all too familiar to Americans. Those aspects of high culture that depend on private patrons flourish... but art of a more public character, much of that which requires direct or indirect government subsidy, has suffered... and British public television, which made a distinct art form of that medium, has been forced into new economies and a new consciousness of ratings...' He goes on to observe that: 'Liberty has never been as firmly established as a distinct political ideal in Britain as it has been, through the First Amendment and the rest of the Bill of Rights of the Constitution, in the United States...'

As someone who has worked both sides of the Atlantic, I would say this. Both countries are capable of being overly complacent: Americans about their First Amendment rights, and we about our cultural integrity. What's important is that Professor Dworkin has spotted the direct and fundamental relationship between constitutionalised liberty and the manner in which art, journalism and broadcasting function in a free society. If that relationship is not perfectly understood, how can it be kept in balance, how can it be preserved? Because make no mistake, if it is not sustained, terrible damage will be done to our society.

The artist, the communicator, in order to enjoy that constitutionalised liberty, has to accept the consequences of his work. Consider movies. Good or bad, they tinker around inside your brain. They steal up on you in the darkness of the cinema to form or confirm social attitudes. They can help to create either a healthy, informed,

concerned and inquisitive society or a negative, apathetic, passive, ignorant one: the kind that cannot be bothered to take part in the democratic procedures which result in the control of their everyday lives.

Consider again those paintings stacked in the shadows in Leningrad. It's virtually impossible for those of us lucky enough to be able to talk of freedom as a birthright fully to understand, to know, what the liberation of the artistic mind and spirit now under way in Russia must feel like. How ironic it would be if, at the same moment that the Eastern European world seems poised to tilt and change, we become unguarded and uncaring about our own freedoms. Those works, locked away from light in the Russian Museum, represent a great moral obduracy. How encouraging it is that they have not only outlived their creators, but also their oppressors. Lacking a clear sight of *our* enemy, we too should take care that we don't complacently allow our best work to be consigned to the limbo of the unmade.

Our best hope lies, probably, I think, in Europe. I believe that Europe is slowly reasserting itself as the creative and moral leader of the industrialised world, as the custodian of what's best in western cultural values. In that very real sense, the old world may well be becoming the new world—a new world of ideas, of political innovation. The old enemy, parochialism, is likely to recede; we shall find ourselves part of a broader European experience, the diversity of our cultures will inevitably more freely mix, more freely interact. All the more reason, therefore, jealously to guard the diversity of our art and of our ideas. Perhaps it's rather encouraging that very expensive efforts to construct a pan-European television channel, based on an idea of one simplistic marketplace, have flopped. Diversity has resisted that imposition.

There are other opportunities. For example, it would be good to believe that we will be joined in this new vision of Europe by that considerable group of gifted film-makers who have formed the cutting edge of artistic liberation and social change in Eastern Europe. I hope they will join our new community of ideas—or rather, rejoin it, as the paintings in the Russian Museum have, and enhance it.

Politically, there may be an historic sea change in process. The artist must rally to it—must take on the responsibility for supporting the potential of such a change. Or, at the very least, he should try. We must try. Like many others, I have a passion for my craft and the process of its growth to an art form capable of uniting, in peace, that family of man of which we are all a part. And I accept that responsibility, if for no other reason than the sustaining quality of its purpose. ■

DR. STOCKMAN IN CALCUTTA

DEREK MALCOLM reports

on Satyajit Ray's first film
in five years, an optimistic
adaptation of Ibsen's
'Enemy of the People'

In 1962, Satyajit Ray made *Kanchenjunga*. It was his first film in colour and, miraculously, considering its beauty and subtlety, it was made in record time—26 days. *Ganashatru*, his new film, looks set, he says, to beat even that. And this from a man who is supposed to be an invalid, and whose health is strictly monitored by his doctors. It might suggest that the worry about him has been exaggerated.

In fact, he has been quite seriously ill. He admits to two heart attacks (his wife, Bijoya, says three) and has had a heart bypass operation at Houston, Texas. Which is why for five years his doctors have forbidden him to work on a feature film. Asked what made him choose his own free adaptation of Ibsen's *Enemy of the People*—*Ganashatru* means 'public enemy' in Bengali—he replies: 'My cardiologist.'

The fact is that the whole film could be shot at Indrapuri Studios, fairly near Ray's home in Calcutta, where at all times there was an ambulance on the

premises. Each day, the doctors were there on the set to monitor Ray's pulse and blood pressure; though it seemed, when I was there, that they were as much interested in the shooting as in their distinguished patient's health, and were very proud of the fact that he had consulted them about the medical matters contained in the film. Certainly, though working a short day, starting at eleven in the morning and usually ending around four in the afternoon, Ray showed no sign whatsoever of strain. He seemed immensely happy to be back at work after five long years away and, as usual, in total command of everything.

He had written the screenplay himself and had already thought about much of the music he would use. And though his son, Sandip, was operating the camera—again because the doctors told him not to do the job himself—Ray left no one in any doubt that he was fully in charge. What has helped him complete the shooting so quickly, he says, is the professionalism of the cast, hand-picked and led by Soumitra Chatterjee, an actor who has now appeared in no less than 13 Ray films, as the Bengali version of Dr Stockman.

Chatterjee confides that, at the beginning of the first day's shooting, he was very worried indeed: 'He seemed uncertain and hesitant—not at all like his old self. But as soon as we really got into the work, all his old energy seemed to

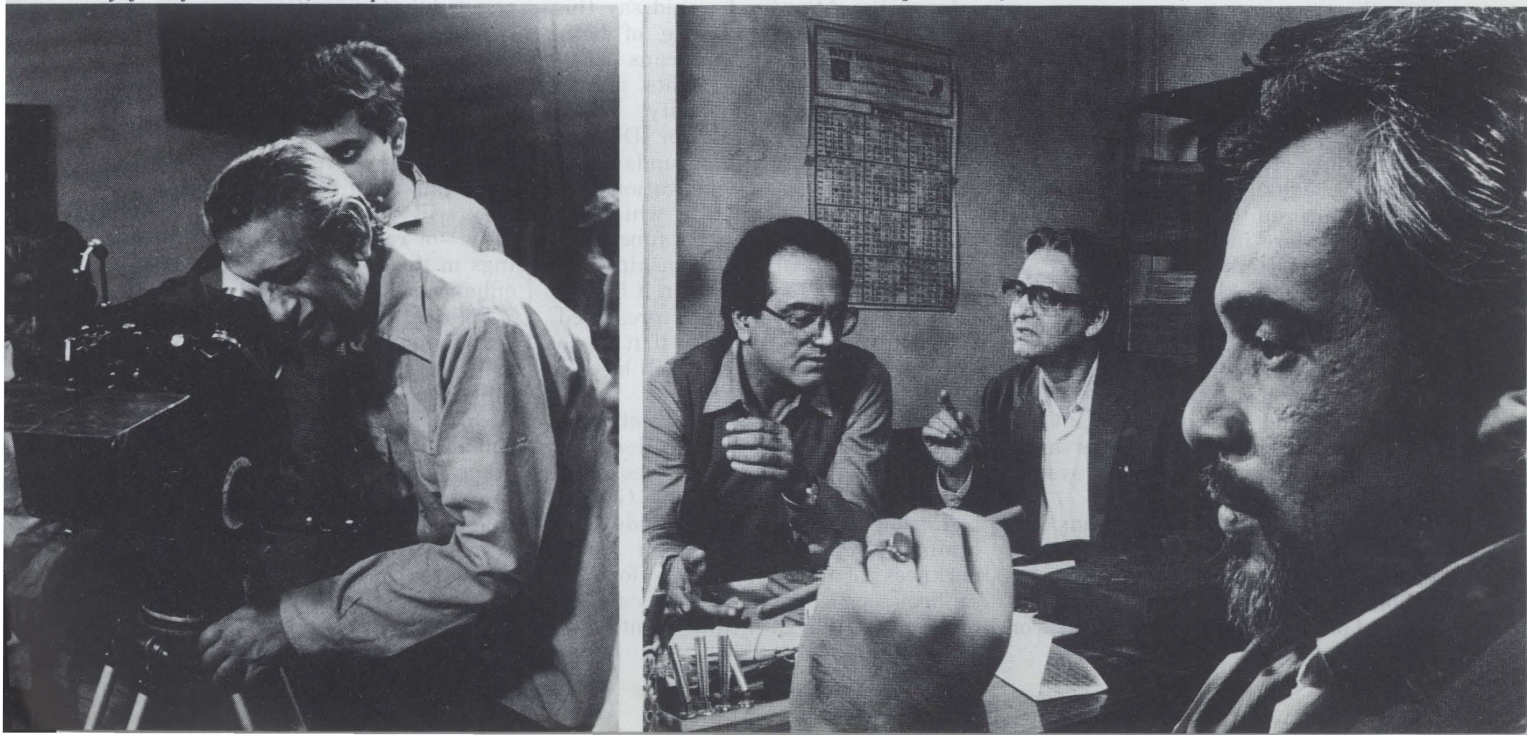
return. It was wonderful to see the effect of the film-making process upon him. It completely revitalised him. Even his doctors, who are pretty cautious people, say it is as good as jogging for him. We are all so glad he is back. It is such a privilege working for him.'

Ray himself says: 'I must say I never thought I would enjoy shooting something so dependent on words quite so much. Today, for instance, we have managed to get six minutes done—we were supposed to do three or four at most. So we are well in advance and even under budget. The reason is, of course, that I have such a magnificent cast—all highly skilled professionals. I have often used amateurs, as you know. And they can be wonderful. But there is no doubt that you can move faster with such skilled people around. We communicate with each other so easily. Take Soumitra, for instance. He knows exactly what I want, and I only have to raise an eyebrow for him to alter his performance a little. Of course, it is absolutely a two-way process. I make suggestions to him and he makes them to me. It is the same with everybody. I go with a screenplay and a shooting plan that is fully prepared but I try never to be inflexible. You simply have to change your plans occasionally, and you must receive new ideas wherever they come from.'

Ray adds that he chose the Ibsen play because of its total relevance today,

Satyajit Ray with his son, Sandip.

Dipankar Dey, Soumitra Chatterjee and Dhritiman Chatterjee.



particularly in India. But the adaptation is clearly not slavish. There are few of Ibsen's actual lines in the script. 'I made several versions as I went along and, as I changed my own work, it became a little more unlike the original. Now I sometimes forget about Ibsen altogether. For instance, I have given rather larger parts to the doctor's wife and daughter—they are fleshed out much more than in the play. And there are other significant changes. My ending is quite unlike Ibsen's. That famous line—"The most powerful man is the one who stands alone"—is not in. It is simply that I don't feel it is appropriate. I have been rather more hopeful, or at least my ending admits hope. The most pessimistic of my films was probably *The Middleman*, which was also about corruption. Now I prefer to be more optimistic. There are still honest people in India, you know, though I wish there were more. Corruption, however, is pretty rampant. Yet I still have a feeling that the best of our nation will come to the top and succeed in the end.

'In my version of the story, which takes place in a small town somewhere in Bengal, there is a temple which is the centre of attraction. It is considered by most people to be a holy place. But an outbreak of cholera occurs and the much respected local doctor discovers that it is in the water there. That's when the trouble starts. But, unlike the play, in the end a group of the younger people in the town support him, and a copy of his findings finds its way to Calcutta, where all the papers take it up. I feel that if anything is different from a hundred years ago, it is the fact that young people are more aware than they were. Now, the doctor would have gained more support and it would be from them. So my new ending is, I feel, quite logical. But we are keeping absolutely to the five-act structure of the play and to the spirit of it. It is my tribute to Ibsen, if you like. But it is not a copy.'

As for the style of the film, Ray says

that though *Public Enemy* is restricted to the studio, it will not be in any way theatrical. 'We're dealing with words, words, words. It is, in a way, a chamber piece. But, of course, we are using the camera as intelligently as possible. I can no longer be my own camera operator, but Sandip is a very good one indeed and our director of photography is Barun Raha, who is an expert too. He used to look after Subrata Mitra's cameras, so he had the best of training. We are trying to make the film as interesting as possible cinematically and not too enclosed in feeling. But the words and the acting are all important. I can't speak for the former, of course, but I can for the latter, and I am absolutely confident of that.'

'Needless to say, the look of the film will not really be very much changed from the rest of my work in essence. Unfortunately, I am still a classicist. I can't tell my stories in the new way. It just wouldn't fit. I still do things roughly the same way. I keep the time for editing between shooting. I like to do it as I go along, which some people might find unorthodox.'

'I've had excellent co-operation from the National Film Development Corporation, who also produced *Home and the World*. They've given me everything I want. But they were anxious for the film to be in competition at Cannes and I was not. I'm a bit too old for that sort of thing now. I just want the film to be seen!

'As for audiences, I hope they will find the film completely contemporary in tone and spirit. It's an urgent message now, isn't it? Pollution is on everybody's lips, and not just in India. So I'm not exactly making an art film. But then I never thought of my films as art films. They are just films.'

'Sometimes I have the feeling that one or two of our younger directors think of art too much, and of their audiences too little. I don't go to the cinema much nowadays—they are so bad in Calcutta except for the new Film

Centre and Sandip has fixed up a video recorder at home for me. But I used to go quite a lot, and to my own films too. I used to watch the audience as much as the screen. And if they didn't laugh in the right places or seemed to have the wrong reaction, I never thought of it as their fault but as mine. I hadn't succeeded in getting my point over well enough. That's a lesson I think quite a lot of our younger directors ought to learn. You must think of your audience. You must communicate.'

Soon, he is showing me his notebook, with the screenplay immaculately written down, accompanied by sketches of sets and costumes. At the end of it, in Bengali notation, are snatches of the musical score he has composed. 'I'm using a mixture of western and Indian instruments on this occasion and, very reluctantly, I had to use a synthesiser for the first time. I didn't really want to but there's a great lack of players of instruments like the oboe in Calcutta. So I have to do what I can in another way. Here's part of the doctor's theme. It's quite a noble one. I think he deserves it, don't you?'

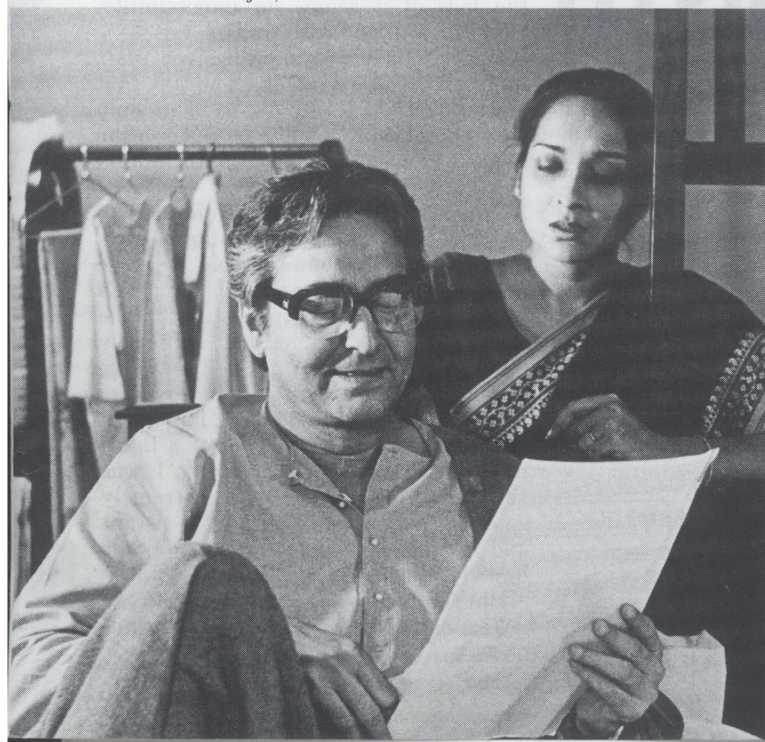
Later, at dinner at his home in Bishop Lefroy Road, Ray confesses once again how tiresome his health restrictions are to him. 'But I have to face it,' he says, without a hint of resentment, 'I won't get any better now. I'll always have to be very careful. No more location work for me. But I'm really enjoying making this film and I must say I feel very fit and well.'

'Yes,' says Bijoya, by way of confirmation, 'He is loving every moment of it, despite the fact that I keep on telling him to sit down when things are quiet. I must say it's wonderful to be there on the set. It's just like a second family. It's a very happy time for us all. He was getting very depressed at not being able to work.'

'But what am I going to do when we are finished?' says Ray.

'Don't worry,' says Bijoya. 'We'll do another one next winter.'

Soumitra Chatterjee, Mamata Shankar.



Cameraman Barun Raha (in striped shirt), Satyajit Ray.





Ellen Greene, Lindsay Anderson and James Whitmore.

LINDSAY ANDERSON: I have done hardly anything for television before *Glory! Glory!*, except for one play, what they call a television play, *The Old Crowd* (1978), from a script by Alan Bennett. I had a very good time working on that with Alan, but it was received with great hostility by almost all the critics and I was labelled 'the only man who had ever made Alan Bennett unfunny.' I think that was because we really went out on a limb and made a film which was satirical and a bit surreal, in places a kind of *hommage* to Buñuel, and that isn't at all the kind of thing people expect to see on television. It was really gratifying that it created such a stir and was so disliked, though when it was shown again recently nobody took any notice of it at all.

The only result, unfortunately, was that I wasn't invited to do anything else for television in Britain. So when this invitation arrived from America I was particularly intrigued, because the script had a kind of satirical energy and edge to it which seemed unusual for television, and quite close to many contemporary issues, I am happy to say, notably in its satirical view of TV evangelism. It's interesting that the script was not written as a result of the revelations of the last year or two, but had been under way long before that. I think the producer, Bonny Dore, got the idea after doing research on Oral Roberts. She got hold of a Canadian writer, Stan Daniels, who is experienced and very good—he has worked on *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*—and he did a script which was more intelligent and hard-hitting than you might expect. The reason, I think, is that *Glory! Glory!* has been taken on by Home Box Office, American cable, rather than a network, and HBO are anxious to produce the kind of work that can't be seen on network. They are happy that we

35 DAYS IN TORONTO

Last autumn, Lindsay
Anderson was in
Toronto, embarking on
a new experience:
Glory! Glory!, his first
television mini-series,
a story about American
TV evangelism.
GERALD PRATLEY
talked to him.

should be a bit trenchant or outrageous, and there has never been any suggestion that the edge of the film should be blunted.

I had been going to do *The Admirable Crichton* in the West End, but my negotiations with the producer fell through. So I was at a loose end when this offer arrived out of the blue. It had to be undertaken quite soon, so there wasn't any of that tiresome business of having to work for ages on the script and argue over it with the producers or the sponsors. I thought, 'Well, it's time I had a go. Maybe it's time I sold out!' I haven't sold out yet, and I'm getting tired of being labelled as someone of great and rather boring integrity—so let's have a go. And that's how I got into it, and came to Toronto to film it.

GERALD PRATLEY: I understand that HBO wanted you to shoot this three-and-a-quarter-hour film in 35 days, which on the face of it seems an impossibility. How did you cope with that?

—I didn't have any preconceived plan; in fact, I was extremely doubtful that I would be able to do it. The only wise precaution I took was to ask Mike Fash to join me. I worked with him on *Britannia Hospital* and *The Whales of August*, and he has now emigrated to America and has also done a lot of work in Toronto. He knows people here, he knows technicians, he was able to pick a very good crew, and I insisted that he should be the cameraman. If they hadn't got Mike, I might well not have done it, because I would never have been able to shoot in 35 days. I am not a very slow director, but I'm not a lightning director either. However, I was very lucky: our unit was extremely good; we had an excellent first assistant and on the floor the organisation was first class.

—Did you have a say in the casting?

—Yes, as far as the leading parts went,

in a limited way because I came into the project late. Bonny Dore had had some trouble getting the film financed and HBO were dubious about the subject. They finally said that they wanted a director who was not from television, and I suppose that's how someone hit on me. When I went out to Los Angeles, I quickly realised that not only I was on test but, in a way, the whole subject, and I had to convince Home Box Office that I could make this film and be the right person to do so. I'm quite good at putting on an act of confidence, which more or less is what I did, and somehow they said OK.

By that time, however, there had been a great deal of research done on the actors. Fortunately, when I heard the name of Richard Thomas as a possibility, I immediately said, 'He will be excellent,' and the same with James Whitmore. Ellen Greene I only knew from the film *Little Shop of Horrors*; I saw four short-listed actresses and chose her. In Canada I participated in the casting with Karen Hazzard, the Toronto casting director, who produced lots of actors, made some very good selections. There was certainly nobody cast whom I didn't approve of.

We are only in Toronto because of the complex financial reasons—which are far beyond me—that make it cheaper to film here than in the States. The picture is supposed to take place in Texas, but there is some complicated tax-shelter arrangement here. If you employ a certain percentage of Canadian talent, the film qualifies for a tax rebate or something of that kind from the Canadian government. That's why we ended up in Toronto, with at least ten producers.

It was a situation that makes for complications. As is traditional, however, the producers didn't really contribute anything beyond having made the original deal. As long as we kept on schedule, there wasn't any interference with the way I was doing the film, nor did I find it necessary to depart from the script. The elements in the script were sufficiently attractive and the actors sufficiently sympathetic and stimulating for us to be able to steam ahead. It's still something of a miracle that we managed to get through the picture in 35 days. The additional requirement, which was that the director's cut should be accomplished in three weeks, turned out to be a total fantasy. In fact, we have done it in about six weeks—which, in itself, is quite ridiculous.

This has been another new experience for me. The picture was shot on film and transferred to tape, and we have been editing it on a system called Ediflex. This is much too complex for me to describe or understand, but it has enabled us to get through the editing faster than if it had been on film. There again, I have had the advantage of an absolutely first-class editor, Ruth Foster, an American young woman who was one of the first really to get into the complexities of Ediflex editing. She had a terrific initiation when she had to edit the Paul Simon African concert, which I

understand was extraordinarily complicated. She has now got through *Glory!* *Glory!* marvellously—the only problem being that she was quite considerably pregnant when we started the work, which has meant another race against time.

—Have you found it difficult to adjust to computerised editing procedures?

—Not exactly, because I don't mind working with a technology that I don't fully understand provided the creative part of it is familiar. Editing on this machine is not so very different from the traditional system. Except that there are some things you can do much more quickly and some things that drive you almost mad with impatience. All the same, I think the ability to handle film and to take the strips out and hang them in a bin and look at them is invaluable. It's much more difficult to have to do everything on a video screen and carry it all in your head. So this is not something I particularly want to do again, although there is always the stimulus of a new experience.

G.P.: There is a great admiration in North America for British films which are said to be made for television, whereas the American made-for-TV film only has a reputation for cutting corners.

L.G.A.: In Britain, Channel 4 has helped to finance films and then has the right to show them, either before or after their cinema screenings. But the films have not exactly been made for television—they have been made for Channel 4, if you like, and that is a different thing. Though if you take *My Beautiful Laundrette*, the interesting thing is that it *was* made for television and was shown in cinemas really quite by chance and at first somewhat to the alarm of the director, Stephen Frears, because he said, 'Well, I only made it for television.' I think the real difference is the kind of subject liable to be financed by Channel 4, which leads to some of the new British films being a bit lacking in the ambition one associates with a cinema film. There is a certain restriction of imagination or idea, rather than the feeling that if you make a film financed by television you have to restrict it in terms of technique or style.

Glory! Glory! is somewhat different. Plainly, although the spread of the story is quite great, it's not possible in 35 days to give it the kind of wit you would have in a movie. If we were making it as a movie, we would certainly have had at least a week or ten days in Texas to shoot some locations. Here we have had one day shooting at York University and that has been our exteriors. My approach to it has been completely pragmatic—to get the script on to film as inventively and expressively as possible. When you take on a subject like this, I don't think you indulge too much in theory.

—How far did the schedule force you into different procedures from those you followed on *The Whales of August*?

—If we had been making *The Whales of August* for television, I imagine it would have been done on a four-week budget, and it wouldn't have been shot in Maine but in a studio with a few exteriors. It would have been a different kind of film and it would have been much diminished. I think the fact that we were making a movie creates a psychological difference. I know that some of the American technicians on *The Whales of August* expected us to shoot it like a television movie. They just expected us to give it an overall lighting and then go in to shoot all the sequences. But, of course, we didn't. We shot it with the care that goes with making a movie. But that is true of this film also, and how you have to look at it, if you like, is that the restrictions or economies are present in the script.

I've had the producer say to me once or twice, 'Oh, it looks a bit claustrophobic,' and I have to say to her, 'Well, since you gave me one day to shoot exteriors, and since we never had a particularly convincing exterior location for the headquarters of this evangelist movement, what more do you expect?' But, of course, the trouble is that the better the film turns out, the more they begin to judge it as though it was *Gone With the Wind*. I have to repeat '35 days' and, of course, they forget about that. At the beginning I said to Jamie Paul Rock, a very fine first assistant, 'Look, do you think we can possibly do this?' He said, 'Yes, I think we can, with style and humour.' I thought, well, I've got a good chap there, and I think we did it with style and humour.

Jamie Paul Rock, interestingly enough, is American by birth, and perhaps that accounts for some of his energy. I have found that the Canadians I have worked with have mostly been very agreeable, but there is a strange conformism and acceptance of things—certainly a lack of radicalism which I hadn't expected. I had probably thought they would be more like the Australians, but Canadians aren't like Australians, and they're not really like Americans either. They seem to be oddly satisfied with the way things are.

G.P.: When you are filming overseas, do you keep in touch with what is going on in the world, or in the film world? Is that important to you?

L.G.A.: It's absolutely unimportant: I don't keep in touch. Occasionally I look at the British papers on a news-stand and I even think of buying one. But when I look at them, I see they are just the same trendy, devitalised rubbish as when I left. When you leave home, and you are away even for a month, you somehow expect great changes to have taken place, and it's so dispiriting to read the *Guardian* or the *Independent* or *The Times* and to see that nothing has changed. It's nice just not to have one's nose rubbed in it every day of the week. As far as I'm concerned, there is nothing to keep in touch with, and it's a nice change to see only the



Glory! Glory!: James Whitmore, Ellen Greene, Richard Thomas.

Canadian papers, which contain practically nothing, and indeed to be cut off from all the media nonsense.

—How important is it for you to know what other film-makers are doing?

—Not important at all! It's interesting on a personal level to read that my friend Karel Reisz may be directing a script by Arthur Miller in America. But I have to admit that as one gets older one is less interested in other people's work, and I don't really go to see films much. I often feel that I would *like* to see something, but the business of getting to a cinema and going in and seeing it is so tiresome. Somehow, I do think that after a certain length of time one begins to feel one has seen everything already. It's rare to get stimulus from anything that is being made contemporarily. And that's because one is more concerned with what one is doing oneself: when you are making a film, that's the only film that really exists. If I go and see a movie while I am making a film, I often feel that I'm watching the wrong movie. So, maybe when I get back and have had a bit of a rest, I might venture out and see something. On the other hand, I might stay at home and put my video library in order.

—Do you rent films on video?

—I've hired two or three films to have a look at here. At home, I don't think I have ever hired a video. I enjoy recording films on video from the current television programmes—the classic films, that is. But going to see films in the cinema is generally rather a gruesome experience. I have the impression that they are a bit better in Canada, but in Britain cinemas are depressing places to visit. The exhibition side of the industry is quite largely responsible for the wholesale decline of British cinema, which is just symptomatic of the whole national spirit. But I mustn't go on saying things like that, because it makes me unpopular!

G.P.: You started doing documentaries, you have directed features, you have filmed plays, a rock concert, commercials, you even did a music video, you've worked in the theatre, and now you have done television in the American sense, what they call a mini-series. Looking at all this, you must feel a certain amount of satisfaction.

L.G.A.: I am more conscious of the fact that critics, journalists and producers find it difficult to pigeonhole one if one has done such a variety of things and in different styles. The essence of media success, as you know, is to be pigeonholed, and if I am put in any slot it is as a result of *If . . .*, *O Lucky Man!* and *Britannia Hospital* as a difficult, ironic, satirical and not exactly popular commentator on the ways of the world. That means I have never felt precisely accepted as a contemporary director, chiefly because people don't quite know how to define what I do or what I have done.

None of that matters a great deal, of course, except that with a general reputation for being difficult, which actually means being demanding, one finds oneself not the first choice on many people's lists. It may be significant that the last two things I have done have been in America. Not characteristically American, not Hollywood productions, but not British either. I don't think I would ever have been invited in Britain to direct something like *Glory! Glory!*. To me it has been a stimulating experience, an extremely exhausting one, and I am looking forward to completing it. What will happen next—I haven't the slightest idea.

I'm surprised, however, that I have made as many films as I have. I never thought that I was particularly difficult and I've always had a feeling that I could do many different kinds of films, but I can see how I certainly have typed or seemed to type myself. I also realise,

looking back on things, that I have always been lacking in career dynamics. That's due to a certain laziness that is within me. I'm not lazy when I'm actually working, but I'm like many people who are very obsessive when they work. When they have finished a job they become extremely lazy and don't want to do anything, because they remember how awful it was.

Really, considering the kinds of demands I have made and the kinds of films I have managed to complete, I think it is quite extraordinary that I have made as many as I have. I count them up sometimes—I can't remember how many there are—and I'm certainly pleased, after a rather choosy career, to end up with an American mini-series. At least it shows that I have had it in me to make, I hope, a popular film. I've always thought the films I've made are going to be popular, but they almost never turn out to be. This one, which I've had great doubts about, I've been told by one or two people is going to be popular. So I hope they are right: it would be a good way to bring an erratic career to an end.

Journalists and critics seem to expect every film-maker to make two a year. But in fact, while *needing*, if you like, to make films of a certain personal quality, I have also very much enjoyed working in the theatre. Film people hardly acknowledge the existence of the theatre. They don't go to it, they know very little about it, so that side of my career is generally not at all marked by film writers. I only wish that some of the productions I have done could have been recorded. It's sad that experiences and achievements of that kind vanish into thin air, and we are left with the often extremely inaccurate accounts of writers and critics. However, there they are—they have mostly gone, but they have represented a considerable part of my life and one that I am proud of. ■

U.S. AND THEM

As Anglo-American film relations change, one problem gives way to another. On the one hand, transatlantic money is still pouring into British cinema exhibition; on the other, American backing for British film production dries up. While Hollywood producers are still eager to make films like *Batman* and *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* here, there is significantly less investment in British film-making itself. Factors such as the unfavourable exchange rate, high inflation, the collapse of several up-market us distributors and the poor performance of a number of recent British films in America have all played their part.

All of a sudden, British films are no longer flavour of the month—even to the very limited extent that they ever were. Palace's hopes of cracking the American market on a more ambitious scale foundered with *High Spirits*, the Neil Jordan film that recovered only \$4m of its \$17m budget in the States. Even smaller-scale British efforts did less well in 1988 than in previous years.

For the first time since the 'recovery' of the early 1980s, this country failed to dominate the league table of 'foreign' pictures released in the United States. Only *White Mischief* (\$1.3m in rentals) and *A World Apart* (\$1.1m) earned more than one million dollars. They finished only sixth and seventh in the list of top foreign earners, and were both outside the top 150 films overall. Other British 'hits' like *Stormy Monday*, *Pascali's Island* and *A Handful of Dust* did even less business. And this level of success is put into perspective when it is recognised that abject Hollywood failures like *The New Adventures of Pippi Longstocking*, *The Rescue* and *Casual Sex?*

(all of which went straight to video in Britain) earned \$1.6m, \$2.4m and \$5.3m respectively.

It is not surprising, then, that British merchant banks, newly alert to the film industry, are now turning away from British productions and investing instead in American films, where budgets and profit margins are higher. It is salutary to note that Jeremy Thomas' \$120m programme originally involved no UK money at all. The Japanese, Americans and Europeans showed more faith in his abilities than the home financiers.

BOX OFFICE AND TURNSTILE

One statistic that can nowadays be relied on to raise the spirits is that detailing British cinema attendances. Last year saw audiences rising towards 80 million, a figure some 25 million above the low point of 1984. Looked at another way, of course, it means only that we have clawed our way back towards the level of attendance that we passed on the way down in 1981.

Even so, few would deny that this steady growth is encouraging. Even fewer perhaps can confidently suggest reasons for the unexpected turnaround. Various explanations have been put forward, ranging from the impetus derived from the 'renaissance' of film production and the energy flowing from British Film Year to the cutting of cinema seat prices and boredom with television. At first, one widely touted theory was that queues at the box office were a 'product-led phenomenon', i.e. that they were drawn there by better films. Even the normally perceptive Broadcasting Research Unit put their weight behind this hypothesis in their presentation at the 1985 London Film

Festival, presumably agreeing with the old adage that 'there's no problem a good film can't solve'—or as Samuel Goldwyn was reputed to have put it: 'Our trouble is a paucity of bad pictures.'

It was never a very plausible assessment, given that the films on show in Britain are largely the same as those exhibited in America, where audience size has been relatively stable for many years. It seems even less convincing now that attendances have continued to rise for four consecutive years. I doubt if many would argue that we have been blessed with a period of consistently attractive movies.

There was a period when the cinema's decline was explained in similarly simple terms. The evil then, of course, was television. That this was an inadequate appraisal was established as early as 1962 by John Spraos in his book *The Decline of the Cinema*, an argument rehearsed again in the BRU's recent *The Last Picture Show?*. It is clear that a whole variety of social changes spelt doom for the cinema. Greater wealth which was allied to the widespread availability of the motorcar (leisure could be sought further from home, a fact the cinema chains continue to ignore); central heating which made the home itself more attractive to stay in; urban relocation which destroyed large segments of the working class and its traditions; the emergence into the light of the teenager, a phenomenon previously spotted only in the back row of the stalls...

Taking a wider view, we can see that social change seriously affected the climates of the three main working-class habitats of the interwar years—the cinema, the public house and the football stadium. All started to lose customers: all had to change or die. The pub, backed by the power and wealth of the brewing industry, did eventually transform into something entirely different, the old spit-and-sawdust, mild-and-bitter days rapidly consigned to distant memory. It was football and the cinema, with no fairy godmothers to care for them, which suffered.

What is fascinating and, I think, instructive is to see parallels in their recent histories, parallels which suggest that looking for explanations of audience increases in terms only of the cinema industry itself is short-sighted. Ferdinand's simple theory is that if it was fundamental social change which caused film and football's decline, then similar macro factors are likely to be at the root of any subsequent developments.

Readers will be aware of how cinema audiences in this country peaked at 1,600 million in 1947, started to fall and went into what the BRU have called 'the great decline' of the 1950s, followed by the 'slow death' of succeeding decades, reaching a nadir of barely 50 million in

High Spirits: Mary Coughlan and Beverly D'Angelo.



1984. Postwar football attendances climbed to 41 million in the 1948/9 season, suffered a huge fall in the 50s and, after a period of stability around 28 million in the 60s, fell steadily again thereafter, dropping to a mere 16.5 million in 1985/6. Yet the following season saw a climb to 17.5 million, the first significant increase in many years, and 1987/8 produced a further rise to almost 18 million. Why should football, with its massively publicised hooligan problem and a product, in my jaundiced view, generally less attractive now than ever before, and the cinema, facing the challenge of video and cable, both suddenly draw more paying customers?

That really is a question for the sociologists (an endangered but not yet extinct species in this country). What does look clear to me is that the two phenomena are related and that explanations must once more be couched in terms of overall social change rather than through references to tarted-up foyers, better seating or blockbuster films. Only a fool or an expert would venture far into this mine-laden territory. Claiming to be neither, I may perhaps be permitted just one hesitant step with the suggestion that simple demographics cannot be entirely overlooked. The birth rate, it will be remembered, peaked in the 1960s, resulting in a bulge in the population in the late 80s of people in the prime cinema-going age group, the 16 to 24-year-olds. Observation suggests that football crowds also consist to a high degree of young adults.

The next few years will see the other side of the demographic coin. Between now and 1995 the number of 16 to 24-year-olds is expected to fall by some 1.2 million, or around 20 per cent. Any leisure activity which relies heavily on young people is going to face a period when it will have to run very fast just to stay in the same place. No doubt all those companies busily constructing multiplex cinemas will have taken this factor into account...

PLAY UP

On the theme of sport, it is a lasting curiosity that Britain, reputedly a country of sports fanatics, rarely makes films on a sporting subject. When such pictures do appear, they almost invariably fail to represent the sport in a convincing way. I suspect it may all come down to the sort of person that the British theatrical tradition attracts into acting.

So many Hollywood actors are physical in a way that is matched by few of their British counterparts. It is no surprise to see Garfield, Douglas, Ryan, De Niro, Stallone, Newman and many others looking suitably pugnacious in a boxing ring. It is hard to imagine Jeremy Irons or Daniel Day-Lewis looking quite so fierce with their gloves up, or to recall Sean Connery or Oliver

Reed doing so. Hitchcock's *The Ring* (1927) is still as famous as any other British fight film.

Other sports reflect a similar pattern. Bruce Dern looked the experienced runner that he is in *On The Edge*, while Mariel Hemingway seemed to be an athlete from headband to Reeboks in *Personal Best*. Jan-Michael Vincent may not really be *The World's Greatest Athlete*, but he gave a fair impersonation. Laurene Landon and Vicki Frederick made wrestling look a very tough game indeed in *The Californian Dolls*, while even Robert Redford appeared relatively at home on skis in *Downhill Racer* and with a baseball bat in *The Natural*. Nick Nolte clearly wasn't going to let anyone down on the field in *North Dallas Forty*, while less macho personalities like Jamie Lee Curtis and Woody Allen, glimpsed with rackets in hand, have suggested that they would not make fools of themselves on the tennis court.

Of course there is also a considerable list of Hollywood stars who actually started out as sportsmen—Burt Reynolds, Johnny Weissmuller, Chuck Norris, Billy Dee Williams, even Arnold Schwarzenegger and Steve Reeves if we stretch definition a little. In Britain we can point to Dave Prowse—and inglorious failures like motorcyclist Barrie Sheen, whose bid for stardom in *Space Riders* finished well down the field. British actors just don't seem to be natural sportspersons: perhaps they take up acting because they can't show off on the sports field.

Alan Bates looked lost with a cricket bat in *The Go-Between*; Ian Charleson seemed to be running in diving boots in *Chariots of Fire*, while the more convincing Ben Cross was condemned to

winning his gold medal largely in slow motion. Bob Geldof (in *Number One*) was no match for Newman and Cruise on the pool table, while Richard Harris' potentially promising Rugby League debut in *This Sporting Life* was undermined by Lindsay Anderson's tenuous understanding of the game. The best that poor Michael Winner could come up with in his search for an actor to take on Ryan O'Neal in *The Games* was Michael Crawford.

It's perhaps not surprising that cricket has figured only rarely in feature films—though one still winces at recall of 59-year-old Jack Warner padding up for England—but even football has yielded little. I can remember the disbelief and hilarity at Ipswich Town's ground when *Yesterday's Hero* was being shot there before a league match. Endlessly repeated and predictably fruitless attempts to manoeuvre Ian McShane's boot into rough proximity with a football almost brought the stands down. Malcolm McDowell didn't look a lot better in *The Raging Moon*, though he managed the outrage and dissent perfectly. Even John Huston could do little for Michael Caine's unavailing efforts to look the part in *Escape to Victory*, where the skill was wisely left to Pele and the other real pros. In *Gregory's Girl*, Gordon John Sinclair was all too convincingly inept, while Dee Hepburn certainly had the legs but sadly lacked most other attributes.

It seems that when British actors are required to play up and play the game, their directors will continue to be forced back on old stand-bys like the extreme close-up of rushing bodies, the rapid montage of figures in indeterminate action and shots of grimacing faces and

Every inch an athlete: Mariel Hemingway in *Personal Best*.



DOUBLE TAKES

sweating brows. The best representation of sport in a British film that I can bring to mind remains Brian Glover's hefty football teacher in *Kes*, bowling over little boys as he roared down the field to shoot past a petrified keeper. But then Glover was that rarity, a British actor-sportsman, as accustomed to the bright lights of the wrestling ring as of the studio floor.

HEAVYWEIGHT CONTENDERS

While Frank Bruno prepared for his big fight with Mike Tyson, an equally fierce contest was going on outside the ring. Rupert Murdoch's Sky Channel, which was to start beaming down programmes just three weeks before the fight on 23 February, was challenging the commercial rrv stations for the right to broadcast the event, in what seemed likely to be just one in a round of confrontations between old and new. In fact round one had been fought out the year before when Sky's satellite rival, British Satellite Broadcasting, attempted to wrestle the rights to British football matches away from the established terrestrial networks. In failing, it did succeed in driving up the unrealistically low prices that television had been paying for the product.

Presumably both satellite companies will rely heavily on cheap soaps, chat shows and game shows to fill the bulk of their schedules. The real competition will come in areas like sport and films. BSB has already signed a £150m deal to ensure ten hours of sports programming every day for five years. Sky's sport will be produced by Eurosport, a company jointly owned by Murdoch's News International and twelve European Broadcasting Union members (including the

BBC), and will be competing with another service on the Astra satellite, W. H. Smith's 24-hour Screensport. Only days before heavenly transmissions were due to begin, the latter had instigated a formal complaint against Eurosport alleging a breach of European Community regulations regarding competition. Observers predicted that this might be just the first volley in a protracted battle.

Meanwhile, vast sums had been spent in aligning the Hollywood studios. Sky naturally has Mr Murdoch's Fox, plus Disney/Touchstone, New World and Orion. BSB has Paramount, Universal, MGM/UA, Cannon—and David Puttnam. Both companies have separate deals with Warner Brothers, and there are smaller fish (Rank, Virgin, Vestron, etc) yet to fry. In excess of \$1,000m has already been poured into the coffers of Hollywood.

Whether this level of investment is wise remains to be seen. Nobody knows how eager British viewers will be to spend money on dishes and programmes when they already have four channels and 60 per cent of them possess VCRs. Sky has already lowered its estimate of likely viewing households by the end of 1989 from 2.5 million to 1.25 million, half of which will be linked by existing cable systems. With the current shortage of dishes in the shops and the general confusion over what to buy, even this figure could be wildly optimistic. Saatchi and Saatchi, the advertising agency, feel that an estimate below 500,000 may be more realistic—and that includes dishes attuned to both Sky and BSB.

A survey conducted by Media Audit suggests that advertisers are 'unimpressed by the advent of satellite

television' and that the majority are undecided about using the medium. Massive losses in the early years are inevitable, but a lot of money will still be made available to persuade viewers to view and advertisers to advertise. High-profile events like Tyson v Bruno will be essential if the public is to be convinced that it wants or needs access to more (and generally far cheaper) programmes.

At present there is widespread cynicism. Few feel that the market can support two major satellite outfits, and one expert has predicted that satellite and cable together may never gather more than eight per cent of the total audience, a figure too small to make profits for even one company. Yet it is hard to lay much money against Murdoch's powers of persuasion on an audience which, against most expectation, took to video faster than any other country except Sweden. Murdoch's eventual victory in securing the Tyson fight certainly gave round one to the challenger.

ROLE PLAY

Stop me if you've heard this one. See, there's this Hollywood executive, a hot shot, newly created Head of Production at a big studio. He loves the power—but the flip side is insecurity. Should he play safe and make studio producer Charlie Fox's pre-packaged prison drama, or should he listen to his conscience? For Bobby Gould's conscience has been stirred (along with other parts) by his sexy young secretary who urges him to make instead a message picture. About radiation and the end of the world, no less.

What distinguishes David Mamet's *Speed-the-Plow* (currently at the National Theatre) from similar tales of tough times in LA is that his powerful executive acts, from first to last, like an ingenue on her first date. Indecisive and prevaricating, he is run dizzy by both the fast-talking Fox (just believably) and the humourless, speech-making temp (totally unbelievably). The dilemma as presented here might just keep a real Hollywood honcho amused in his jacuzzi for five or ten seconds. But probably not.

Perhaps Mamet simply wants us to believe that studio heads are born stupid; just as, in *House of Games*, he created a clever psychologist who fell for scams that wouldn't have tempted a ten-year-old. The problem is that real-life film executive and former Fox President Sandy Lieberman has praised Mamet's play as 'the real thing... a composite of movie studio life and philosophy that's remarkably accurate.' Lieberman is an experienced producer and a cultured man. Yet his judgment here seems to me to be about as sound as... well, Bobby Gould's.

FERDINAND

The Final Test: Jack Warner padded up for England.



DOUBLE TA
-FRAMED-

Zakiya Powell



PHOTO SARAH QUILL

In the little army which constitutes a film's cast and crew the least-considered soldier is perhaps the publicist. Encounter the imposing height of the invariably composed Zakiya Powell, however, on a dusty red ridge in the Rift Valley or in the overgrown grounds of a palace in Hyderabad, cajoling an overwrought player or, with equal delicacy, reining back an over-excited journalist, and one is compelled to pay tribute to the effective publicist's saintly patience and necessary reserve of ruthless diplomacy.

In London's film community, Zakiya—one knows her only as this—trails mystery. An Indian princess of the blood? A continental covergirl? A family background involving escapes and abandonments worthy of the Baroness Orczy? The mystery is not encouraged, but does no harm. She has for the past eight years managed a discreetly discerning publicity business, Zakiya & Associates, principally servicing independent film and television productions. What particularly distinguishes her? 'I am one of the very few unpartnered one-woman publicity outfits in Soho, and I am not, like several others, backed by a wealthy parent organisation.'

Zakiya was born in India. Her father, the Nawab Mir Nawaz Jung Bahadur, was an Oxford-educated Muslim aristocrat, a confidant and advisor to the immensely wealthy Nizam of Hyderabad ('my father may have been of princely stock, but he absolutely never talks about his family; the Nizam, I believe, conferred titles on him'); her mother, Grace Birge, was a New York society lady ('my parents, who had met in Geneva, divorced when I was three and my mother disappeared from our lives completely—she was, I later learned, married three times and had the habit, when she moved on, of leaving behind her children'). In 1947, following Independence and a few months before the Indian army marched into Hyderabad, Zakiya and her older sister Zarrina were sent to London, where they attended first Bute House and then St Paul's Girls' School, Hammersmith.

Their father, who was the Nizam's representative in London, subsequently accepted Pakistani citizenship and travelled the world as a diplomat of the new nation. Zakiya and Zarrina became, it might be said, Orphans of the Partition. Until leaving school, they lodged as year-round paying guests in West London, with irregular holiday visits to their father, wherever he might be, from Senegal to Scandinavia. 'Life was regimented and fairly austere, and St Paul's worked us very hard. From the moment we arrived in London, my sister and I wanted nothing to do with India, we wanted absolutely to be English. My father provided us with a French governess, so my French, particularly my accent, became quite good, but we deliberately forgot our Urdu—which in any case we never spoke at

home. I was serious about the piano, music being one of the few social outlets we were permitted, but apart from having an unformed notion of becoming a teacher I really had no clear idea of what I wanted to do.'

On her father's suggestion, Zakiya applied to Barnard College. 'After the restrictions of London in the 50s, New York at the beginning of the Kennedy era was paradise. I stopped playing the piano, I'm sorry to say, and started going to Harlem—and you could then still go to Harlem—to listen to jazz.' A degree in Sociology led to graduate work in Anthropology at Columbia and also to a job on a national research project on drug-dependence: 'fascinating, ground-breaking, and covering every imaginable addiction.' There followed a stint as a United Nations guide ('very educative, though many guides were simply trawling for husbands'); and, after a spell of married life in Brooklyn to a clinical psychologist ('a brilliant man, despite somewhat old-fashioned ideas on wives and work'), an assignment with UNICEF, lecturing on the agency's work 'everywhere from kindergartens to universities'.

'At this point, I fell by chance into the world of fashion modelling. Bill Blass liked tall models. I went to see him on the recommendation of another designer. This took some courage because I'm inordinately shy; but we liked the look of each other—a marriage made in heaven, really—and I worked for him exclusively for some time. For two years I was quite successful, and for a scholarship girl I certainly made a lot of money. And yes, since you ask, I was indeed a covergirl—though mainly in France—but although I modelled all over the world, Geneva, Paris, Tunisia, I never remotely felt I was one of those sleek, witty New York professionals. High-fashion models always have to appear a bit remote; and not looking like a toothpaste girl, I was always high fashion.'

Zakiya's life has been marked by a number of notable transitions, but none so extreme perhaps as the next. In the early 70s, she turned in her job with the UN, which she had managed to combine with modelling, and moved to London and into the institutional, regulation green offices of the Central Office of Information, Hercules Road, Lambeth. 'There was Peter Greenaway every day seated at his editing bench.' For the next eight years, she was on the road as a writer-researcher for the co-ri, first on a science programme, *Living Tomorrow*, for which she interviewed vets, steelworkers and geneticists, and later on a magazine programme highlighting the 'Best of Britain'.

'We made a short film on a different subject each week. I went everywhere, saw everyone: from whisky distillers, through car workers, to, let's see, Zandra Rhodes—for whom in another life I'd modelled. I knew the whole British Rail network backwards. It was hard, incessant work; but the continuity

was marvellous—if only film-makers had it—and it gave me a wonderful background for publicity. I really can go anywhere, meet anyone and be at home. I also learnt a little about the practicalities of film-making.'

Zakiya learnt the skills of marketing films and film stars in her next job as the London-based manager of advertising and publicity (Europe, Australia and South Africa) for Warner Brothers. 'Again I seem to have travelled everywhere, putting the fire under various European campaigns, comparing market strategies—the Danes, for instance, were particularly inventive, trailing pictures on video screens in cinema foyers. I learnt how posters were adapted, what went well where. For a time, I worked closely with Goldie Hawn, an absolutely consummate publicity manager: she always knew exactly what she wanted to convey to the press. Michael Caine is someone else who has a natural confidence with journalists. He is able to make a five-minute interview seem like a long intimate conversation. Everything sounds fresh.'

In 1981, Zakiya opened her own business, one room in a now demolished building in Marshall Street. 'I saw an opportunity to help independent films market themselves. I've always been able to turn work away; and we tend to specialise in literary projects such as *The Bostonians* and *Prick Up Your Ears*. My first job was publicising the Strasbourg festival, the theme of which was "Films and the Press". It was hugely disorganised and ran only one year. In the early days, there was just me and I took one client at a time; now I employ seven people plus a financial director. In 1988, we handled four films in production, eight or nine in distribution, and the affairs of five corporate clients. A feature film's publicity budget doesn't in my experience grow with the size of the production. On a \$10m picture, it is around \$10,000. There are no extras, forget facility trips, this is where the producer first looks for trims.

'My first big picture was *Heat and Dust*. I had not been back to Hyderabad since my childhood, I knew the book and I took the unusual step of phoning the producer and begging. Ismail Merchant insisted he *never* employed a publicist, but he relented and paid for my flight and I was of use to him—though despite my contacts in Hyderabad, I found that he had sewn up everything on the ground. What did I learn from that experience? Press books must be written on location. Feature writers adore exotic places, as do their editors. (Getting anyone other than the local stringer to visit a windswept Irish location, I later discovered, is a virtual impossibility. From a publicity point of view, certain places seem cursed.) I knew already that stars sold pictures, but *Heat and Dust* taught me the potential of a new face.'

Zakiya maintains that she has never told an actor what to say to the press.

'But I have warned some—the girls in particular—where danger lies. If you haven't been interviewed before, you see the journalist's attentive smile and you mistakenly believe confidences will be honoured.' A picture in the colour supplements pays dividends; and a kind word from Barry Norman to the TV millions can, as in the case of Carlos Saura's *Carmen* which received only a lukewarm press, substantially affect the box office. Press pictures cannot be magicked into existence after the production has folded its tents: a fact that producers tend to overlook, repeatedly. 'I have to hammer away at this.'

What really counts for a publicist? 'A favourable piece in *La Repubblica* or *Premiere* can secure a presale. On a smaller scale, an actor like Paul Scofield agreeing to a rare interview because he believes in a film such as *Nineteen-Nineteen* does register with the public.' These days the outlets on television are mushrooming, and it is the producer who now petitions the publicist. Is all publicity really good? 'For a TV personality such as Jonathan Ross to send up an actor doesn't do any harm, but it doesn't help. An actor's contractual obligation to a picture's publicity is often something of a grey area. Some refuse with reason to have anything to do with it. But on the whole English actors at Venice or Cannes are very flattered, notably by the attentions of the European press.'

One of Zakiya's most successful pictures was *Dance with a Stranger*. Viewing the first rushes, director Mike Newell and producer Roger Randall-Cutler realised they had an undoubted star in the unknown Miranda Richardson. 'She was kept under wraps during the production and no photographs of her were released. Meanwhile, we were swamped with requests from the gutter press: this was, after all, the story of "the last woman hanged in Britain"—though of course it wasn't. The expectations of the press were extraordinarily high: we even had photographers at Cannes trying unsuccessfully to take pictures of the Goldcrest display of their forthcoming films. And then, of course, Miranda, surprisingly unglamorous and with no coaching, came up trumps.'

The future? 'I am beginning to develop projects on my own, advising film-makers on finance and packaging, and I would like to become more involved in corporate work, company image-building. With the writer Sarah Hobson and the programme-maker Parminder Vir, I am a partner in Equal Media, which is a little like a scaled-down Sundance Institute, a company seeding the development of Third World films and television.' The delicate business of tempting cinemagoers and then reeling them in may perhaps shortly give way, one imagines, to a more direct involvement in production. Zakiya Powell carries some useful guns.

J O H N P O W E L L

John Cassavetes



The news of John Cassavetes' death reached the Rotterdam Festival just as his retrospective was winding to a close, and my initial response was to recall Billy Wilder's remark at Ernst Lubitsch's funeral. 'No more Lubitsch,' a friend said, and Wilder replied, 'Worse than that—no more Lubitsch films.' On the face of it, it's hard to think of many directors more dissimilar than Lubitsch and Cassavetes, but each brought to cinema a kind of personal passion that it's never had before or since, despite the fact that each has had a host of imitators and emulators. It even seems possible that Cassavetes influenced almost as many directors as Lubitsch did. Just for starters, one could cite Peter Bogdanovich, Jean Eustache, Henry Jaglom, Elaine May, Rob Nilsson, Maurice Pialat, Jacques Rivette and Martin Scorsese.

In the case of Cassavetes, though, what I had in mind was something specific—the fact that he hadn't lived long enough to make a film of his remarkable play *A Woman of Mystery*, which I had been lucky enough to see during its limited run in a tiny Beverly Hills theatre the summer before last, and which remains one of the key theatrical experiences of my life.

Cassavetes' lengthy career as a playwright and stage director is the least known aspect of his work, but it's worth

noting that most of his major films—including, if I'm not mistaken, *Faces*, *A Woman Under the Influence*, *Opening Night* and *Love Streams*—started out as plays, and even his first feature, *Shadows*, grew out of improvisations in his acting workshop. *Love Streams* was developed from a play by Ted Allen, but the other major works sprang directly from Cassavetes himself, and surely the greatest area of neglect that he suffered was his gifts as a writer—gifts that his misleading and overblown reputation as an 'improvisational' director always tended to obscure.

A Woman of Mystery, which Cassavetes hoped to film if he lived long enough, starred Gena Rowlands as a bag lady and Carol Kane as a young woman who may or may not have been her daughter. Most of the action occurred between strangers on the street, and during the scene changes Cassavetes brought in actual street entertainers to perform. As the play's title suggests, we don't really know who the Rowlands character is, and for most of the time, neither does she—her street existence deprives her of any solid sense of identity, and as unlikely as it sounds, her fluid and unstable character gives her some kinship to the universe of Beckett.

A kind of instinctive, unsystematic modernism has been part of Cassavetes'

work since the prologue of *Faces*, when John Marley enters a screening room to see a film which turns out to be *Faces* itself. *Opening Night* was Cassavetes' *L'Amour fou*, and the strange use of a balletic dream sequence and hallucination near the end of *Love Streams* seems to derive from a comparable impulse. Despite the anti-intellectualism that informs Cassavetes' work from *Shadows* on, the radical direction of his work led him to reinvent many of the tenets of modernism—self-reflexivity, unorthodox principles of exposition and continuity, fractured narratives, dissolution of personality, even a certain refusal of psychology—in his own idiosyncratic terms.

Perhaps the biggest blind spot in most Anglo-American criticism of his work is its insistence on regarding him as a realist, which he clearly was not. *Love Streams* went a long way in clarifying this fact, and *A Woman of Mystery* went even further. At one point in the play, Rowlands enters a nightclub in a fancy evening dress; whether this scene represents her own fantasy projection or someone else's, a flashback or a flash-forward, is never made clear, and within the play's special context, it never has to be.

In a brief but perceptive article written for the Rotterdam catalogue, Peter Bogdanovich rightly calls Cassavetes a revolutionary, and emphasises the profoundly political aspect of his work, another facet that has been widely neglected and misunderstood. Part of what made *Shadows* such a revelation when it was released in 1960 was its capacity to deal so acutely with racism without ever alluding to it more than obliquely in the dialogue. When Cassavetes shifted his focus to the middle-class in *Faces* and *Husbands*, he broadened his audience without ever compromising his radical social critique of the American soul, though it took me some time to realise this.

Throughout his career, it was always too easy for critics to shrug off the difficulty and complexity of his work by settling on the most obvious meanings and ignoring the rest. The off-putting aspect is that his characters tend to be mediocrities, yet Cassavetes loves, respects and defends them with such unqualified fervour that the very expression of this sentiment becomes a political act. 'I Can't Give You Anything But Love', sung so memorably at the end of *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie*, becomes the anthem not only of the defeated, pathetic, but indefatigably stylish and noble owner of an LA strip joint (Ben Gazzara), but of the writer-director who conceived him.

What is it, one may ask, that makes the uncritical adoration of mediocre characters a political act? *A Woman of Mystery* takes this bull by the horns by lavishing its attention on the sort of incoherent derelicts who in contemporary America aren't supposed to be noticed at all; indeed, as Jonathan Kozol's recent book about the American homeless (*Rachel and Her Children*)

suggests, the entire ideological weight of Reaganism may rest on its capacity to make such people invisible and incoherent, even in part to themselves. Cassavetes deals with this incoherence in the most radical way possible, not by assuming the liberal ploy of trying to make these people as legible as the rest of us, but by exploring their lack of definition from within—assuming it as a given and proceeding from there. One should recall that Cassavetes' violent break with Stanley Kramer over *A Child Is Waiting* in 1963 stemmed by his own account from his conviction that there was nothing wrong with mentally disturbed children—that the problem in coping with them was ours, not theirs.

Family feelings run very deep in Cassavetes' work, whether the charac-

ters are actually related or not, and the uncertainty over whether Rowlands and Kane's characters in *A Woman of Mystery* are related becomes crucial to the question of their very existence. Significantly, Cassavetes' own home, the central location of both *Faces* and *Love Streams*, becomes almost as important to his work as his gifted actors, and the absence of any home or family (surrogate or otherwise) in *A Woman of Mystery* becomes apocalyptic in its implications.

According to the standard measuring devices, Cassavetes ended his directorial career with the aptly named *Big Trouble* (1985), a Hollywood comedy with Peter Falk and Alan Arkin which he took on as a personal favour to the producer after the scriptwriter Andrew Bergman left the project. (According to

Bogdanovich, given Cassavetes' health at the time, it was a fatal mistake, and to make matters worse, the film wound up getting chopped to pieces by the same producer.) But the standard measuring devices of the marketplace aren't equal to the task of assessing Cassavetes, and it would be more accurate to say that he ended his career with his crowning work—a drama of rare mastery and power that most of his audience will never be able to see. It would be interesting to know if the production was videotaped, and if there is any possibility that the play might eventually be published.

JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

Richard Roud



Richard Roud first came to the SIGHT AND SOUND office some time in 1956. He had written an article, or perhaps he merely wanted to discuss writing one. All I remember is that he arrived very late (not, as it turned out, at all characteristic), just as I was ready to give up and go home, and that we stayed on talking about films and France and the novels of Henry James until the cleaners turned up to turf us out.

Memory can be very deceptive. I would have bet that Richard's first piece

for SIGHT AND SOUND had to have been on a French theme, possibly Bresson. In fact, turning up the files, I find that it was no such thing, but a review of *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit*—an assignment that can hardly have thrilled either of us. It was not until three years and several articles later that he really hit his French stride for the magazine, talking to Marguerite Duras about *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*.

By that time, Richard was well established around the BFI. Born in Boston in

1929, of a second-generation American family with origins in Riga, he went to the University of Wisconsin, came to Europe on a Fulbright scholarship to study first at Montpellier and then at Birmingham, and decided he would like to stay in England. When we first met, he was employed in rather a part-time way, teaching English at an American airforce base. Never entirely secure himself on the finer points of grammar, he was excessively and none too cheerfully preoccupied with split infinitives, dependent clauses and the like.

Escape beckoned. By 1959 he was National Film Theatre programme officer, and in 1960 was put in charge of his first London Film Festival (only the fourth to be held). *L'Avventura*, *Moderato Cantabile*, *Rocco and His Brothers*, *Virgin Spring*, *The Lady with the Little Dog*, *Les Bonnes Femmes*, *Shoot the Pianist*. Not a bad festival, he noted drily, years later. And, as he also commented, 'Things were far easier . . . in the old days you could afford to be very choosy; this film or that wasn't quite good enough.'

The 1960s were right for Richard—and Richard for the 60s. Hollywood was going through a period of quite profound loss of creative confidence. European cinema was at the heart of things, and at the heart of Europe were France and Italy, the two countries whose films most permanently appealed to him, however much he might formally deny it. Godard and Antonioni were changing not just the face of cinema, but some of the ways we looked at a city or a landscape. Richard tended to bristle at jokes that his festivals listed heavily towards Paris; but of course they did, and properly so. 'Roud Defends Godard: If that makes news,' said a tart *Variety* headline some years later. But in the early 1960s defending and promoting Godard and the other new wave filmmakers, and Antonioni and Bertolucci, did make news; and the right kind of news. The London festival, of course, was never a one-man show, but Richard was the front-runner, the enthusiast, not necessarily for easy causes, the man who could push through an opinion.

In 1962, New York was added to London. Dr William Schuman, newly appointed head of Lincoln Center, came to the BFI for advice on launching a film festival. When it turned out that what he really had in mind was not to follow but to replicate London, and that Richard's status as an American would prevent any chauvinist outcry, James Quinn, then director of the BFI, agreed that the two festivals could be run in tandem. The main difference, Richard commented in a 1981 *SIGHT AND SOUND* interview, was one of public profile. A New York screening could make a film (he cited Bertolucci's *Before the Revolution*) in a way that never quite happened in London; the event was central, not in a small theatre lurking under a bridge; the critics paid it more heed; and audiences, not as in London house-trained in the ways of the NFT, reacted either more effusively or more angrily. More than London, the New York festival made Richard; and Richard made the festival.

As other obituaries have noted, he was in a position strongly to influence taste and the fate of films: director of two major festivals, film critic of the *Guardian*, still running NFT programming. One of the agreeable things about Richard was that it never felt like that at the time. He stood sturdily by some highly individual likes and dislikes (one film in each festival would usually come to be regarded as 'Roud's folly'), but he never set himself up as an arbiter or assumed that mantle of self-importance favoured by the New York critics. In any case, we were all too busy. In those days, the NFT programme office was not on the South Bank but in the BFI's Dean Street headquarters, where it shared one floor of cramped, untidy offices with *SIGHT AND SOUND*, the *Monthly Film Bulletin*, and at one time the BFI Education Department, the switchboard, an administration office and an unsalubrious hovel which was the Institute's concession to any employee unwise enough to feel unwell.

Expansion and advancing years have brought staidness and empty corridors to the Institute. In the 60s, work overflowed noisily out of offices, occasionally punctuated by a whimpered rebuke from the switchboard operator's guide dog. The programme office consisted, for a while, of Richard, Pamela Balfrey (now Pamela Engel of Artificial Eye), a tower of composed strength, and a secretary. Richard, a mild hypochondriac who was later to confront serious illness with great stoicism, kept a thermometer handy. When it all became too much, he would while away an idle moment by taking his temperature—sometimes to be discovered with a thermometer in one corner of his mouth and a cigarette in the other.

His energy could be formidable; always surprising in someone who was also good at being indolent. When, in 1967, we published the first volume in the Cinema One series, a joint venture between Secker and Warburg and the BFI, there was never any doubt that it

would be Roud on Godard. It yielded some of his best critical writing, as well as getting Cinema One off to a best-selling start. Earlier, Richard had written the BFI Index on Max Ophüls, a ground-breaking piece of work on a director then by no means widely regarded. Ophüls seems to be one of those film-makers fated to be 'discovered' at regular intervals. Later discoverers have tended to approach him through the American films, *Caught* and *The Reckless Moment*, and of course *Lola Montes*. Richard focused on a then unknown 1930s film, *La Signora di Tutti*—and of course *Lola Montes*. In 1971 he wrote a discerning study of Jean-Marie Straub, also for Cinema One; in 1980 came *Cinema: A Critical Dictionary*, a work which was so long in the editing, growing ever more wayward and unwieldy, that it became something of an endurance test for everyone connected with it; and in 1983 *A Passion for Films*, his affectionate study of Henri Langlois.

In the 60s, one of Richard's strong cards as NFT programmer was his friendship with the magnificent, impossible Langlois. Relations between the Cinémathèque Française and the BFI had not been easy, partly because of irreconcilable differences of temperament and approach between Langlois and Ernest Lindgren, curator of the NFA, partly because of some long-running feud over a print of *L'Age d'Or*, which Langlois affected to believe had been the victim of hanky-panky while in Institute hands. Langlois trusted Richard, as far no doubt as he trusted anyone. Prints from the Cinémathèque, often hand-carried on the night ferry by the long-suffering Lotte Eisner, became more readily available.

At the end of the 60s, Stanley Reed, then Institute director, compelled Richard to make a choice which to most people had come to seem inevitable: London or New York. He chose New York, and at about the same time gave up his job as *Guardian* film critic to become, as he remained, a roving arts correspondent for the paper. There is little doubt that he made the right choice: New York offered more excitement, greater opportunity to exert influence, and one of Richard's concerns was that films should not merely be displayed in a festival showcase but go on to reach a wider audience. A consequence, perhaps, was that London went the way of most festivals around the world, growing ever larger, while New York remained small and highly selective. It was programmed by its director and a committee of critics, on which Susan Sontag, Andrew Sarris and Richard Corliss served at various times; it was not afraid to be considered elitist.

In the introduction to *Cinema: A Critical Dictionary* Richard set out what may be considered his critical credo, though he might have jibbed at a word with overtones of pomposity. He had begun his own cinema-going at the age of five: 'I have always mistrusted the

judgment of those who... were not able to enjoy movies until they had had proof of their intellectual validity.' He was 'wary of systematic criticism and of any form of critical terrorism.' He confessed to blind spots: Eisenstein, Bergman, Rossellini and, always surprising, Mizoguchi. And he listed the film-makers he most admired. Among the contemporary names—Godard and Straub, Resnais and Truffaut, Losey and Bertolucci—most if not all were also personal friends.

Richard was professionally committed to knowing 'everyone', but he was not by nature gregarious, seldom to be encountered at festival parties. He had, he once said, wanted a job which would enable him to live in New York, London and Paris; and he achieved it, moving regularly each year between his three cities. An extreme reluctance to fly, following some mishap in early life, meant that his journeys were rather stately progresses, governed by the schedule of the QE2. London friends knew when they could expect the telephone call, always beginning 'This is Richard' (unnecessary; the voice was unmistakable), the lunch arrangement, almost always at the same restaurant (consternation followed the closing of the Hostaria Romana in Dean Street, for years a favoured refuge), the encounter with the sharp wit and continuing, enlivening curiosity about whatever he might have been missing.

In June 1987, in New York, he was taken seriously ill with heart trouble. And in October that year, after what was by all accounts a notably successful New York festival, he was ordered to resign as director and did so in a blaze of local publicity. It was a bungled business, of press leaks, reports of 'interpersonal problems' and disagreements over the composition of the committee. Several members of the committee, including Richard Corliss, resigned in his wake. For his own part, Richard kept his cool, his dignity and his sense of humour.

Early in December 1988 he was as usual in London, looking well again and notably cheerful. He had signed up to present a series of French films at a festival in Sarasota, Florida; the first draft of his biography of Truffaut, on which he had been working for several years, had been delivered to the publisher. We talked about the article on Louis Malle published in this issue, which was probably the last thing he wrote. He sent it by fax on 5 January, just before leaving for a holiday in the South of France. It was while there that he suffered a massive heart attack, from which there was no real hope of recovery, and he died in hospital at Nîmes on 13 February. 'Richard is possibly irreplaceable,' David Denby said during the great New York debacle. Make that probably.

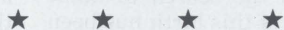
PENELOPE HOUSTON

CHARLIE CHAPLIN CENTENARY



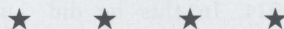
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THE DAY THE TRAMP WAS BORN

B O B E R G L U N D



Fxactly when did Charlie Chaplin first put on the tramp costume that was to become the best-known suit of clothes in the world? The question has fascinated and frustrated film historians and Chaplin biographers for more than half a century. Imagine being present at one of the most significant events in the history of film—a moment enshrouded in myths. Imagine witnessing the birth of a figure which was to become a symbol for browbeaten humanity, and at the

same time an emblem for the film itself and everything associated with it. To the film historian the search to know the exact moment of this birth has been something like the quest for the grail.

Chaplin arrived at Mack Sennett's Keystone Studio in December 1913. His first film, *Making a Living*, was released on 2 February 1914. In this he did not yet wear his tramp costume; but already in his second film, *Kid Auto Races at Venice*, released on 7 February, he appeared in the way we are used to seeing him.

'Careful inquiry has failed to reveal the exact day the film was made, but it appears to have been one day during the last week of December 1913,' wrote Robert Payne in *The Great Charlie* (1952). Other writers have guessed at other dates, confusing the issue.

No studio records exist to help us. But unlike most films, *Kid Auto Races at Venice* was not filmed in a studio but at a public event—a pushmobile race for children at Venice, a small town with a popular amusement park, situated on the coast just outside Los Angeles.

Obviously there must have been some reference to this event in the press; so bearing in mind all the speculation about when the film was made it is an astounding fact—and somewhat embarrassing to point out—that it seems not to have occurred to anyone simply to turn up the newspapers of the time to find out when the races took place. When we do so, sure enough, in the *Los Angeles Times* of 10 January we find a small announcement (see next column) headed 'Venice: 2 Big Days'.

Kid Auto Races at Venice shows the races themselves, and not the parade announced for the following day. Thus the film, in which Chaplin is seen for the first time in the clothes that were to become world-famous, was indisputably shot on Saturday, 10 January 1914.

So the problem is solved . . . or is it? Unfortunately there is a further complication, in that Chaplin, in his autobiography, states that the first film in which he wore the tramp costume was *Mabel's Strange Predicament*. This was released two days after *Kid Auto Races at Venice*, though of course the films were not necessarily released in the order they were made.

Although there are no payrolls or other detailed studio production records to help us—the Mack Sennett archives bequeathed to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences are mostly concerned with the years after 1915—there is at least a bare record of the dates when the cut negatives of individual films were ready to be sent East to the parent organisation, the New York Motion Picture Company (NYMP), where the positive prints were prepared for distribution. A record of these 'finished/shipped' dates was in fact published by Kalton C. Lahue in *Mack Sennett's Keystone: The Man, the Myth and the Comedies* as early as 1971, but, regretfully, little use has been made of it by researchers.

This list provides us with a new *terminus ante quem* for every film, enabling us to push back the date before which the film must have been made—previously the release date was the best available evidence. Thus for Chaplin's first three films, we have the following data:

	finished/ shipped	released
MAKING A LIVING	14/1	2/2
KID AUTO RACES AT VENICE	17/1	7/2
MABEL'S STRANGE PREDICAMENT	20/1	9/2

Now we know that *Kid Auto Races at Venice* was shot on Saturday, 10 January 1914; firm ground to stand on at last in this bog of earlier guesses. The film was sent to New York exactly a week later, Saturday 17 January. Thus it took one week to cut the working copy, and with this as template to cut the negative and prepare the necessary titles. We cannot assume that the interval between shooting and completion was invariably seven days, but we



Making a Living: 'I did not like my get-up as the press reporter,' Chaplin noted in *My Autobiography*.

should realise that at this time Sennett was hard-pressed. The studio had just been enlarged and production was to be increased. With no backlog of films in reserve, contracted delivery dates had to be met. Films had to be made quickly, in assembly-line fashion, since from 15 December 1913 Sennett had undertaken to deliver three one-reel films per week plus one two-reeler per month. The list of Mabel Normand's films, with finished/shipped data, for this period reveals the high rate of production (Mabel had just begun to direct her own films):

WON IN A CLOSET	30/12
MABEL'S BEAR ESCAPE	11/1
MABEL'S STRANGE PREDICAMENT	20/1
LOVE AND GASOLINE	2/2

This shows the films despatched to New York at intervals of 12, 9 and 13 days respectively.

Shooting a one-reel film took at most three to four days if nothing exceptional happened. Chaplin tells us that some films were made in a day. If we assume one or two days to prepare for filming, set up the scenery and arrange for props, three to four days' shooting, and about seven days to work on the negative, with the possibility of interruption due to bad weather, we can recognise that there is not much scope for margins of variation from the estimate of about one week between completion of shooting and shipping of the negative.

There are very few films for which we can determine the exact day of shooting; though we have another example with which to compare our estimate. In *A Busy Day* Chaplin fools in front of a camera, as in *Kid Auto Races at Venice*, but this time dressed as a woman. The film was directed by Sennett at the opening of the harbour at San Pedro on 11 April 1914 (when the inauguration speech was made by the then Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Franklin D. Roosevelt), and was again shipped exactly one week later, on 18 April 1914.

In his autobiography, Chaplin complains that for a long time after his arrival at Keystone Studios—his contract officially ran from 16 December—he had nothing to do. Sennett wanted Chaplin to wander about the studio and study what was going on. Chaplin was not at all happy. In 1921 he told Robert Florey (later a film director himself, and credited as associate director on *Monsieur Verdoux*): 'Several weeks went by before I made my debut in front of the camera. By the beginning of January it had got to the point that I almost regretted leaving the Karno troupe.' Finally, however, he got his chance, and, under the direction of Henry Lehrman, *Making a Living* was filmed—it is said in three days.

For the most part *Making a Living* was shot outdoors; and throughout the film the sun is shining and casting heavy shadows. If we study actual weather conditions in Los Angeles at this period, we discover that Christmas

Venice 2 Big Days Saturday Jan. 10 Junior Vanderbilt Cup Races

30 Entries 2:30 P.M.

Sunday Jan. 11

2 Annual Prize Pushmobile Parade 2:30 P. M.

60 Entries

Harney Oldfield, Teddy Tetzlaff
Earl Cooper—Judges

Be a Boy Again

week, 22-28 December, was for the most part cloudy and rainy. Not until Saturday was there bright sunshine. During the week of 29 December-4 January it rained on Tuesday and Wednesday and was cloudy during the rest of the week. The following week (5-11 January), however, began with brilliant sunshine and high temperatures, up to 82°F—though Thursday, with north winds, was cooler than the three preceding days. Friday, Saturday and Sunday were again cloudy, though without rain. The likeliest succession of days for shooting *Making a Living*—bearing in mind the sunshine in the film and the finished/shipped date of 14 January—would be between 5 and 8 January.

A striking case of *contradictio in adjecto* is to be found in Georges Sadoul's *Vie de Charlot* (1952). In the chronology at the end of the book he states (as do Pierre Leprohon and other French sources) that *Making a Living* was made on 16-19 January—which is of course impossible, since the film was finished/shipped on 14 January. In the text, however, he declares that Chaplin first stood in front of a camera, in *Making a Living*, on 5 January. He nowhere indicates where this information, unique to his book, came from. In the 1978 edition the contradiction is unresolved. Since, after the confusion and guesses, this date seems to be the most plausible, it would be particularly interesting to know Sadoul's source.

Chaplin does not even mention *Kid Auto Races at Venice* in *My Autobiography*, but goes directly from *Making a Living* to *Mabel's Strange Predicament*, for which film he claims he created his famous tramp character.

The day after I finished with Lehrman . . . I was in my street clothes and had nothing to do, so I stood where Sennett could see me. He was standing with Mabel, looking into a

hotel lobby set, biting the end of a cigar. 'We need some gags here,' he said, then turned to me. 'Put on a comedy make-up. Anything will do.'

I had no idea what make-up to put on. I did not like my get-up as the press reporter [in *Making a Living*]. However on the way to the wardrobe I thought I would dress in baggy pants, big shoes, a cane and a derby hat . . .

In all comedy business an attitude is most important, but it is not always easy to find an attitude. However, in the hotel lobby I felt I was an imposter posing as one of the guests, but in reality I was a tramp just wanting a little shelter. I entered and stumbled over the foot of a lady. I turned and raised my hat apologetically, then turned and stumbled over a cuspidor, then turned and raised my hat to the cuspidor. Behind the camera they began to laugh. Quite a crowd had gathered there, not only the players of the other companies who had left their sets to watch us, but also the stage-hands, the carpenters and the wardrobe department. That indeed was a compliment. And by the time we had finished rehearsing we had quite a large audience laughing. Very soon I saw Ford Sterling peering over the shoulders of the others. When it was over I knew I had made good . . .

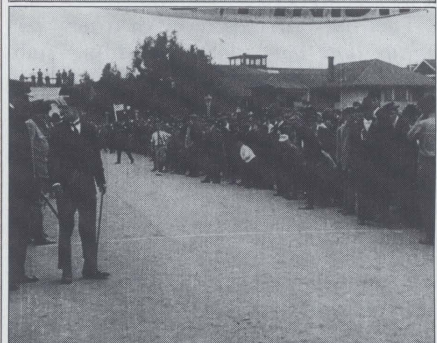
That evening I went home on the street-car with one of the small-bit players. Said he: 'Boy, you've started something; nobody ever got those kind of laughs on the set before, not even Ford Sterling . . .'

In *The Parade's Gone By* (1968) Kevin Brownlow relates that when Minta Durfee, Fatty Arbuckle's wife in this period, visited Europe in 1963, she brought with her a taped conversation with Chester Conklin. In this he recalled that he liked working with Chaplin, but that at first he didn't fit in at Keystone. 'He was a character comedian. He had to work slow. We got

all our comedy out of fast movement, and Charlie couldn't do that.' Conklin went on:

I remember one rainy morning, Roscoe Arbuckle, Ford Sterling and myself were sitting in the dressing room playing pinochle. Charlie wandered in and went up to the make-up bench. In those days we used crêpe hair a lot. Charlie held up various pieces of this crêpe hair under his nose, then looked at himself in the mirror. Finally he found a piece that he liked, and he stuck it on there with spirit gum, went over and got Roscoe Arbuckle's hat and pants, my coat . . . and he took his own cane and went out on the set. This was a hotel set, built for Mabel Normand's picture *Mabel's Strange Predicament*, and Charlie went into the lobby and

10 January 1914: the opening sequence of *Kid Auto Races at Venice*.



Kid Auto Races at Venice: 'people begin to laugh, children are delighted.'

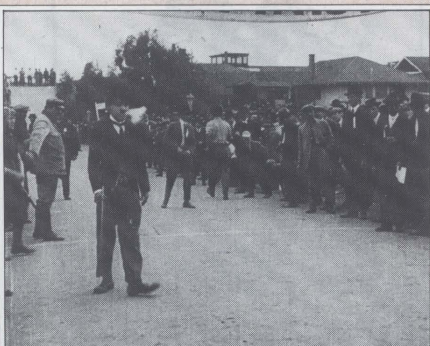


started clowning around doing the drunk act he'd done on vaudeville... Everyone had gathered around and was laughing. Sennett stood back of the crowd and watched. Finally, he went up to Charlie and said, 'Listen, do what you've been doing when we shoot this picture with Mabel and Chester.' Well, of course, it wound up that he stole the picture from us.

Conklin's account of the same story, though somewhat differently phrased, was quoted ten years earlier in Sennett's autobiography *King of Comedy*. Sennett recalled:

We sent Lehrman, Chaplin and cameraman Frank D. Williams down to Venice because we'd read in the morning papers that some exciting automobile races were under way

Chaplin, in only his second film, wore the tramp outfit for the first time.



there. We had no story. We merely cherished the hope, and not too bright a hope in view of Charlie Chaplin's previous failure, that if we turned the little fellow loose to get in the way of newsreel cameras and racing automobiles, Williams might be able to photograph something funny. That was all we had in mind. Actually something of world-wide importance had already taken place a few days before, at the studio. Chester Conklin was there, so let him tell the story:

'It was a rainy day. We tried to start a picture called *Mabel's Strange Predicament* and got soaked. The muslin drapes we had strung over the hotel entrance scene were dripping like dishrags. Then it came down in so many bucketfuls to the square inch that the Old Man [Sennett] couldn't even find sand for us to shovel or carpentry work for us to mash our thumbs with.'

Conklin then continues with the story of the assembling of the tramp costume. The bad weather and the heavy rain have a prominent place in his tale. We must therefore ascertain when the rain began which impeded the start of filming on *Mabel's Strange Predicament*.

The week 5-11 January was, as we have noted, entirely dry. Monday 12 and Tuesday 13 January were also fine days. Wednesday morning was fine but in the course of the day there was rain, which got worse and worse. The Friday papers noted 'heavy rains last 24 hours'. It continued to rain, as a storm warning was announced. The papers of Monday 19 January reported 'rain in L.A. phenomenally heavy'. The storm raged and the rain cascaded. At midnight on the Monday L.A. had received 4.61 inches and at Glendale, the suburb where Sennett's studio was located, the fall was 6.87 inches. The rain was incessant. There were heavy floods and houses and bridges were swept away. It was a new

rain record for the month of January, ending with a very heavy thunderstorm—unusual for this season—on 27 January. In consequence, Chaplin's next film bore the title *Between Showers*.

That the rainfall should stick in Conklin's mind is thus rather natural; but clearly this particular bout of rain did not start before the filming of *Mabel's Strange Predicament*, but immediately afterwards. *Mabel's Strange Predicament* was finished and shipped on 20 January. From 14 January the rain had made shooting on Keystone's open-air stages impossible. Hence the filming must have been finished by this date at the latest.

The difference between Chaplin's and Conklin's versions—apart from the rain—is that Chaplin says that he was ordered by Sennett to put something on and to act at once in the hotel scene, whereas, according to Conklin, he conjured forth the tramp figure at leisure, and then spontaneously went out and did his improvisation, attracting the attention of Sennett and all the others. Which version is correct is impossible to say. However, the second is in closer agreement with what other people have said. Already in *Photoplay* in September 1915 it was remarked that 'the Keystone people say that he was always poking around the property room trying to hit upon some sort of clothes that would "register".' Sennett elsewhere recalled, 'He tried all sorts of make-ups—one of them, I remember, was a fat man. Then he tried other things—I forget just what. In those days we used to see if we could get a laugh from the rest of the gang.'

Perhaps the tramp figure did not suddenly appear in its final perfected form like Athena from the head of Zeus. Perhaps it did not happen quite as Chaplin himself would have us believe in his autobiography, as something

'A crowd of spectators at a public event discover... the birth of a myth.'



inexplicable, almost miraculous. Chaplin's early statements, however—those he made before he had been proclaimed a genius and had to live up to that image and prestige—are important. In his 1964 autobiography he says that he was unemployed between his arrival at the studio and his first film; but in 1921 he told Robert Florey, 'I made numerous small test films' (in Florey's original French publication, *Monsieur Chaplin ou le rire dans la nuit*, this appears as 'je fis plusieurs bouts d'essai'). Did these tests involve him in experiments with different costumes?

Since *Kid Auto Races at Venice* was made on location, away from the studio and the other actors, the shooting of *Mabel's Strange Predicament* had to be the first occasion on which Conklin witnessed Chaplin at work in the tramp costume, irrespective of which of the two films was shot first. But if *Kid Auto Races* were the first film with the tramp, how could Chaplin himself have forgotten and stated that the first use of the character was in *Mabel's Strange Predicament*? Perhaps we may conclude that if his assertion is not an actual truth, it represents rather a psychological truth.

We must remember that Chaplin was already well known—even famous—in the vaudeville theatre before he went into films. A three-year tour had established him as one of the most popular comedians in the United States. He had received a fine training and had acquired great experience during his time with the Karno troupe. He was a professional, who had worked hard to win the position he now occupied.

Then, suddenly, he was starting at the beginning again. He was without experience as a film actor. Everyone, even Sennett, doubted his ability. Naturally this was a severe blow to his self-confidence. People whispered behind his back. He risked scorn and contempt. Yet the next moment, and among the very people who had dismissed him as a failure, he was able to turn the tables and produce laughter, to feel once more that he had an audience in his hand—and not just any audience but one made up of the professional film comedians who had doubted him. This was, of course, the supreme triumph, the success that he never forgot. Obviously it was then that he felt he had been 'born' as a film comedian. The fact that a day or two previously he had been ordered to go to Venice with the awful Lehrman not even to play in a 'real' film but to provide comic relief in a reportage about pushmobiles must have appeared to him as degradation and another failure—unless, of course, he regarded this trip as just another costume test.

At this point we have evidence from a key person, the director Henry Lehrman. Robert Florey got to know him in the early 1920s, and later, when they became neighbours, they often talked. 'I

had never even heard of Chaplin,' said Lehrman:

I knew that he was a Limey, some said he was an acrobatic dancer, others that he had been a clown in a circus. To me it made no difference at all. I asked Sennett what clothes he should wear and Sennett said that as he was a Limey he had better dress himself as a lord.

Thereafter Lehrman related how Chaplin looked in his first film, *Making a Living*, but that he was dissatisfied and

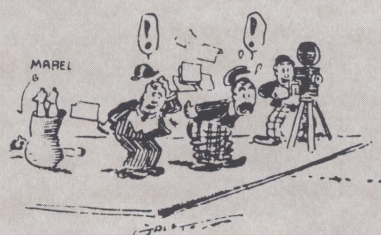
told me that in his next film he was considering dressing himself up as a tramp. A few days later we were getting ready to go out to Venice . . . and I saw Chaplin arrive wearing the costume that was to make him famous . . . And that's how we got to see Charlie Chaplin for the first time in his 'Trampy' disguise, in the film *Kid Auto Races*, which wasn't supposed to be anything more than a lighthearted documentary about kids, but which became his second film. I finished it the same day; Chaplin acted without rhyme or reason in some of the scenes in the film.

Two days later, after he had seen the rushes, Mack Sennett told me that he thought the Limey was very funny and that, together with me, he was thinking of making Chaplin's third film; Mabel Normand should also have a part. Our co-operation was rapid and simple: Mack directed some scenes with Mabel while I photographed the scenes with Chaplin. We worked with two cameramen and this one-reel film, which we completed in the course of the day, was given the title *Mabel's Strange Predicament*.

Cartoons from *Photoplay*, September 1915.
Below: Mack Sennett, Chester Conklin and Chaplin running away with the show.



CHESTER CONKLIN WAS SUPPOSED TO STAR IN THE FIRST KEYSTONE PICTURE THAT OUR HERO APPEARED IN — BUT



SOMEBODY ELSE RAN AWAY WITH THE SHOW !!!!

Three weeks later I directed in a few hours the fourth Chaplin film in the street outside the studio. This took place in February 1914 and that was the last time I worked with Chaplin.

The most striking feature of Lehrman's account is his chronology. This fits exactly with our newly gained knowledge of the date of the auto races



HIS FIRST PICTURES WERE NOT MUCH OF A SUCCESS — HE APPEARED AS A WOMAN IN ONE OF THEM.



and the weather conditions. After speaking about *Making a Living*, he says, 'A few days later we were getting ready to go out to Venice.' Assuming that *Making a Living* was finished on 7 January, 'a few days later' would point to our definitive date of 10 January. Then comes his very exact 'two days later', after Sennett had seen the rushes—i.e. Monday 12 January; and on 14 January it began to rain. According to Lehrman, *Mabel's Strange Predicament* was filmed in one day, which might have been 13 or even 12 January: the film was finished and shipped on 20 January.

'Three weeks later I directed . . . the fourth Chaplin film . . . in February 1914.' This would bring us approximately to 2 February. The film in question is *Between Showers*, in which a gigantic pool of water plays an important part at the start. The great rain stopped around midnight on 27 January. The film—finished/shipped on 7 February—had

therefore to be made two or three days earlier than 2 February, in the last days of January, before the pool dried up. But we can allow for the ordinary discrepancies of everyday speech to call this period 'three weeks'. In comparison with all the earlier contradictory statements in circulation, Lehrman's information is amazingly exact, allowing all the pieces of the puzzle to fall neatly into place.

Why should Lehrman's memory be so much better than everyone else's? Was there some special psychological reason for his recall of these events? All this happened during Lehrman's last month with Sennett, and he was irritated—first with Chaplin, then with himself. It is known that Chaplin and Lehrman did not get on well and had rows. Though he says nothing about this, what angered him was that Chaplin questioned his direction and way of making films. It was intolerable that an inexperienced newcomer should defy an

old professional. Chaplin recalls:

Although the picture [*Making a Living*] was completed in three days, I thought we contrived some very funny gags. But when I saw the finished film it broke my heart, for the cutter had butchered it beyond recognition, cutting into the middle of all my funny business. I was bewildered and wondered why they had done this. Henry Lehrman confessed years later that he had deliberately done it, because, as he put it, he thought I knew too much.

There is a slightly hostile, defensive note in Lehrman's opening comment: 'I had never even heard of Chaplin . . . to me it made no difference at all.' We can almost hear him continue, 'But imagine if I had . . .!' Was he angry with himself for failing to recognise Chaplin's potential? If he had played his cards properly he might have made himself into Chaplin's irreplaceable collaborator and his fortune would have been made. Subsequently Lehrman's jealousy of Chaplin seems to have become an obsession.

In the middle of February 1914 Lehrman left Sennett, along with Ford Sterling, to make films together. From this moment Chaplin's star rose and Sterling's set. Lehrman and Sterling quarrelled. Lehrman abandoned Sterling, and founded his own company. There he contracted a comedian called Billie Ritchie, who like Chaplin had been with Fred Karno and had played some of the same parts, and from July 1914 began to produce comedies with Ritchie in the Chaplin costume and character. He continued to produce Chaplin imitations for many years.

The decisive question remains, could *Mabel's Strange Predicament* have been completely or partly filmed before *Kid Auto Races at Venice*? The only possibility would have been Thursday 8 January and Friday 9 January. But Lehrman should have remembered this, because he was actually present: he is visible in the first long scene of *Mabel's Strange Predicament*—the hotel lobby scene—as a guest strolling in the background. There is also support for Lehrman's claim that he and Sennett shared the direction. It has always been supposed that this was due to a quarrel between Chaplin and Lehrman, which required Sennett to step in; but even if Chaplin had refused to co-operate with Lehrman as director, he was evidently forced to do so later in *Between Showers*.

There is a more likely explanation: Mabel Normand was now responsible as director for her own films. Sennett asked Chaplin to act in the first scene of the film, but after his success in this sequence, realised that the character of the tramp could not disappear from the film without a trace. The part was not however in the story synopsis which Mabel had been given and was supposed to follow. One can imagine the all-out mobilisation to adapt the scenario and

Mabel's Strange Predicament: the hotel lobby, with Chaplin and Mabel Normand.



think up gags to accommodate Chaplin. *Mabel's Strange Predicament* was for a long time one of the rarest and most inaccessible Chaplin films, and many previous commentators, including Jean Mitry, state that Chaplin only appears in the first scene. In fact he is present in nearly all the scenes from beginning to end. There was another possible reason for all-out effort on the film: Sennett, with his dependence on sunshine, was no doubt a student of weather forecasts, and could have known that storms were in the offing. So there was a brainstorm before the rainstorm.

In the 1916 *Charlie Chaplin's Own Story* (which though spurious did have at its core a newspaper interview with Chaplin) and in Samuel Goldwyn's 1923 *Behind the Screen*, in which Goldwyn allows Chaplin to present himself, Chaplin describes the tramp figure and the success he had with it in the hotel scene. Here, surprisingly and contradictorily, he states that he had good time to think about the matter, to prepare himself and to reflect on what he should do.

This is inconsistent with *My Autobiography*, in which he describes how he was ordered by Sennett to dress up, and thereupon went directly out in the tramp costume to play the scene. Perhaps, though, the solution to the whole problem lies in the small discrepancy we have previously noted between Chaplin and Conklin's versions.

Conklin, both in the taped interview and in the quotation in Sennett's *King of Comedy*, speaks of Chaplin's spontaneous improvisation on the hotel lobby set, before the actual filming:

... and Charlie jogged over to the hotel lobby set and made like a drunk ... A crowd gathered. Mabel [Normand] and Ford [Sterling] and Hank [Mann] and [Charles] Avery and [Fatty] Arbuckle and Minta Durfee were laughing at Charlie. We didn't notice the Old Man had

come down from the tower and was standing in the rear. All of a sudden we heard him. 'Chaplin, you do exactly what you're doing now in your next picture. Remember to do it in that get-up.'

This improvisation may have taken place on Friday 9 January or possibly even on the morning of 10 January, since the auto races did not start before the afternoon. If we are to believe Sennett, his decision to film at Venice was made very suddenly: 'We'd read in the morning papers that some exciting ... races were under way there.' At this point he could have told Chaplin to put something on and get ready to go with Lehrman to Venice at midday. Charlie would then have had time to get his costume together and acquaint himself with the figure and try out its possibilities; and this led to the spontaneous improvisation on the hotel lobby set, which had just been made ready for the following week's filming.

Speculating further, this was when he was observed by Sennett, and asked to repeat what he was doing when the picture with Mabel and Chester was shot. This would give him Saturday evening and all Sunday to work out in detail how he would appear in the hotel scene, which gags he would use and so on. This order of things would to some extent correspond with the assertion attributed to Chaplin in *Charlie Chaplin's Own Story* and in Goldwyn's *Behind the Screen*, that he had some time to prepare himself. Lehrman claims that he saw the tramp character for the first time just when they were setting off for Venice; but there is not necessarily a contradiction here. Lehrman had probably been fully occupied in editing *Making a Living*, and so missed Chaplin's improvisation. The evidence is on screen that he was present at the shooting of both *Kid Auto Races* and *Mabel's Strange Predicament*.

In *My Autobiography* Chaplin has

compressed events: in his memory the improvisation and the filming have become one and the same occasion. So, the fact that Chaplin always regards the hotel scene as being the first appearance of the tramp, although it is difficult to conceive of it actually being filmed before *Kid Auto Races at Venice*, now turns out to be not only a psychological truth, as we surmised, but an actual one as well.

Kid Auto Races at Venice had its opening night on 7 February 1914. But this was not the first time an audience had watched the antics of Charlie the Tramp. At its shooting, Chaplin had had a real-life audience. The public saw a figure which got in the way of the cameramen who were shooting the races. We can see that at the start people think he is someone from the crowd. A few look slightly astonished, others slightly indignant—who is this idiot getting in the way of cameramen supposed to be doing their work? Others again cannot help smiling at this person who does not know better. Some time elapses before some people at least realise that both cameras are not pointed at the boys' cars, but that one of them is shooting only the other camera and the ridiculous figure. People begin to laugh. Children look delighted.

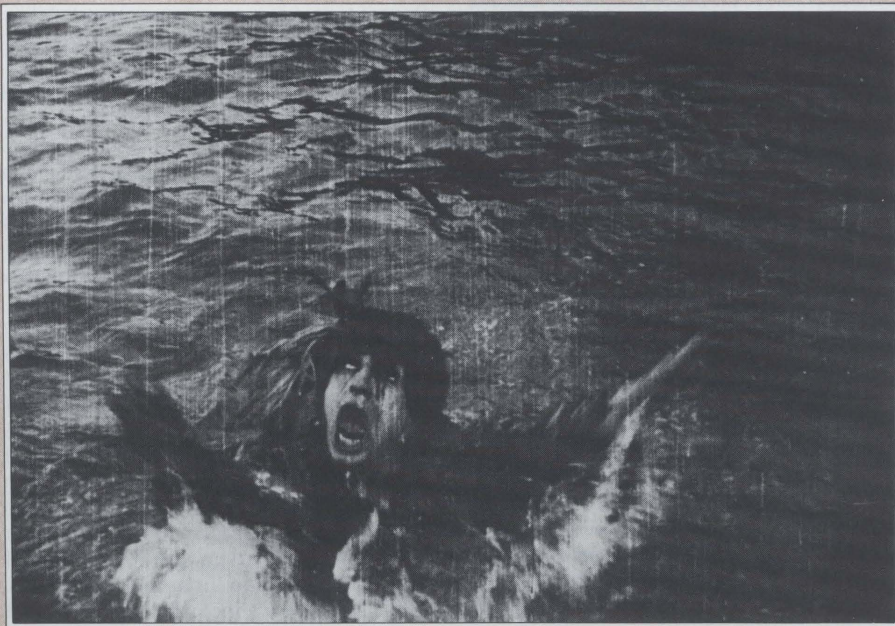
When we watch this film today, we are seeing not only Chaplin, but for the first—perhaps the only—time in the history of the cinema we see how a crowd of spectators at a public event discover and become witnesses to the birth of a myth.

What is unique is that the world's most famous invented person makes his debut not in a created, make-believe world, but in real life. A fictitious being appears for the first time in documented reality, only later to move into fiction for ever. Fact and fiction are inseparably united here in a way that is as wonderful as paradoxical. It is much as if, in the famous newsreels of 1901 showing Queen Victoria's funeral, we suddenly identified Sherlock Holmes standing among the spectators.

Even if *Mabel's Strange Predicament*, or some part of it, was in fact shot before *Kid Auto Races at Venice*, which is unlikely, it still follows that Chaplin's first encounter with an audience outside the private world of the studio took place at the pushmobile races. Without fear of contradiction, then, we may state that the true epiphany of the tramp, his official introduction to the world, took place at half-past two on Saturday, 10 January 1914.

P.S.: Half-past two should rather be half-past one. Recent research has shown inconsistency in the published newspaper announcements. It seems likely that in this case the *Venice Daily Vanguard*, which repeatedly says the races are to start at 1.30, is more reliable than the *Los Angeles Times*, which states 2.30, and that the races began at the earlier hour ... ■

Chaplin in woman's dress and in difficulties in *A Busy Day* (April, 1914).



Based in the small fishing village of Stromness, the cast and crew of *Venus Peter* have been on location for six weeks. Two more weeks to go before the shoot wraps. Some members of the crew are showing signs of acute cabin fever. A choppy twenty-minute boat trip to the Old Man of Hoy affords a change of scene and most of them took advantage of that diversion weeks ago.

Simon Relf of British Screen—he has invested £350,000 in *Venus Peter*—has made a flying visit to check on the film's progress and snatch a couple of rounds of golf with Ray McAnally, who is playing the old fisherman. Colin MacCabe, head of BFI Production, which together with Channel 4 has a £500,000 stake, has also been up for a day or two. Other than these occasional visitors, who after admiring the surprisingly lush beauty of Orkney in October hasten to scurry back to the warmth of London, the cast and crew share the isolation of the seven thousand islanders.

that they've been overwhelmed by our presence,' says Chris Young, who is less anxious about his colleagues' corrupting influence on the islanders and a lot more worried about certain nameless members of the crew going native—one electrician confessed it was the booziest shoot of his life.

Venus Peter is based on a book by an Edinburgh schoolteacher and poet, Christopher Rush. *A Twelve Month and a Day* is an anthology of memories and images of Rush's childhood, the fishing village of St Monans in Fife where he grew up, and the sea. Chris Young, a Scotsman making his debut as a producer after serving his apprenticeship as a trainee on *Another Time, Another Place* and then as an assistant editor on Bill Forsyth's *Comfort and Joy*, optioned the book from the Aberdeen University Press. 'It wasn't obviously a film subject because there was no storyline,' he says, 'but it was full of interesting images and I was attracted by the idea of making a film that wasn't based on social realism but on something as mythical as the sea.'

Ian Sellar, also a Scotsman, had worked variously as a runner, team-maker, art director and assistant director on several films, including Bill Douglas' *My Childhood* and *My Ain Folk*, before attending the National Film and Television School. *Over Germany*, a screenplay which Sellar wrote during his first year at the school, was picked up and co-financed by Channel 4

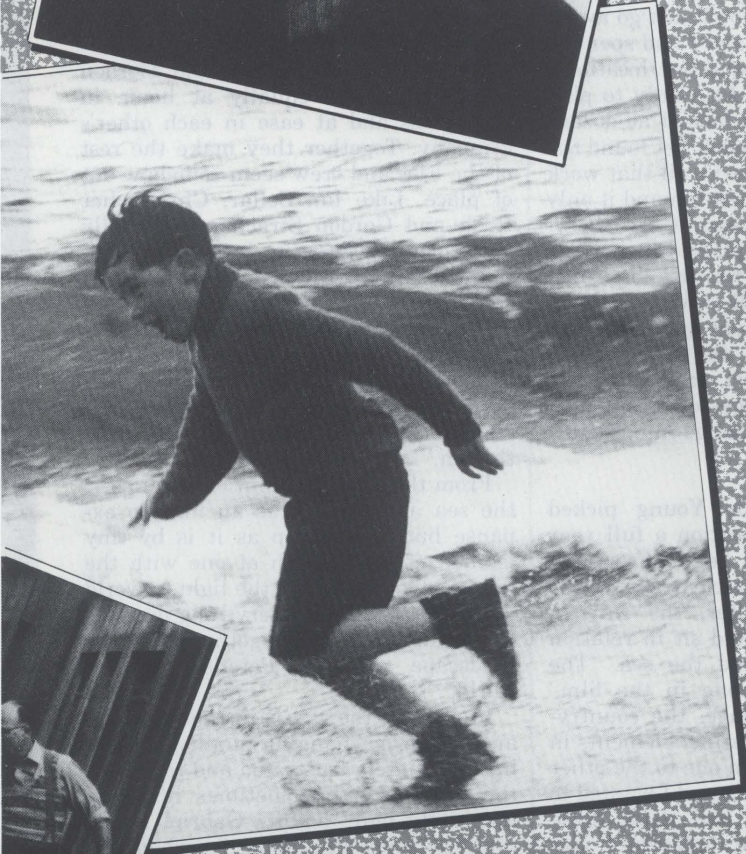
NICOLAS KENT



Left, clockwise from top: director Ian Sellar on the whale; Peter, half-drowned, perambulated to safety; Gordon Strachan (Peter) and the director; Peter's aunts, Emma Dingwall (left) and Robin McCaffrey.



Photographs: TOM HILTON



Right, clockwise from top: Ray McAnally (the Grandfather); Princess Paloma's weekly bath, Alex McAvoy (the Beadle) and Juliet Cadzow; Peter eyeing the whale and on the beach.

and ZDF. Sellar took a year's sabbatical to direct the film in Hamburg before resuming the course and graduating two years later.

A compact, introspective and softly spoken man, Sellar spent his childhood with a pair of aunts in a small village near Loch Lomond similar in many ways to St Monans. 'I felt connected to what happened to Chris as a kid,' says Sellar. 'The sea, the boats, the family.' From Chris Rush's first draft screenplay Sellar reworked the material, drawing on the original novel and conversations with the author. 'After the first draft I was given a pretty free hand to take it forward. It was an exciting challenge because there was nothing obvious in a filmic sense about the book, which is really a series of personal recollections. Because there was no storyline it was a matter of finding one from within the material and from speaking to Chris. It was a slow progression over eight drafts or so. In the end it's not so much faithful to the book as to something that's within the book, an atmosphere, a particular kind of imagination.'

Gradually the screenplay developed from an exploration of the sea and its myths into a story about childhood, a celebration of growing up with the sea as a background to that. The protagonist, Peter, is first seen at his christening and then as a young boy struggling to come to terms with his world. It's a world of water and boats and women: his mother, abandoned by her husband; his restless aunts, Jenny and Georgina; Epp the landlady, 'a Queen Victoria in a black waterfall of lace', who gives Peter boiled sweets and poems and a fearful image of Hell devoid of a single drop of water; Princess Paloma, the solitary hermit, descended, they say, from Thai royalty; Miss Sangster, the village schoolteacher who stamps learning on her young pupils with all the sensitivity of a ticket collector; Miss Balsilbie, the object of Peter's adoration, a bohemian lover of poetry and opera who wants children 'to learn and to remain pure.'

Peter's world is riven by the conflict between the bleak reality of a dying fishing community progressively impoverished by the diminishing hauls of the few remaining fishermen, and his own pure romanticism, which is echoed in the myths and legends and phenomena of nature which surround him. Peter's grandfather, whom the boy reveres and dreams of following to sea, is his only kindred spirit in the adult world. From his grandfather Peter hears how the circular swimming pattern of the herring mirrors the earth's orbit around the sun and how turbot live in pairs, 'the way God ordained it, so when you hook a turbot its partner always follows the other to the surface.'

The screenplay evokes a closer comparison with the work of continental film-makers—the Taviani brothers or early Fellini—than it does with familiar Scottish films. A tendency to misread

the screenplay, 'to bring assumptions about Scottishness to the script', is one reason Chris Young thinks it took him two and a half years to raise sufficient funds to go into production with *Venus Peter*.

All films require an act of faith. The raising of finance for films can be almost akin to spiritual conversion. 'The real difficulty was that there was no reason for anyone to believe that the film would be made,' says the producer. 'There's so little money available for making films that if financiers don't believe a film is going to be made they ignore you and hope you'll just go away. But the fact that Ian and I had spent so long with it—we'd found our locations, we'd approached Ray McNally to play the grandfather, we'd looked at dozens of kids although we hadn't yet found the boy to play the lead part—all that work created a kind of momentum and it only took one person to commit for everything else to fall into place. In a curious way, everybody was waiting for someone to jump first.' Bill Gavin, an independent film sales agent and a veteran of the business, was the first to leap. British Screen, the BFI and Channel 4 followed. With a budget of £1,130,000, *Venus Peter* could at last go into production.

Ian Sellar and Chris Young picked Stromness as their location a full year before shooting could begin. From the beginning Sellar had a clear idea of the landscape he was after, the way in which the village should sit in relation to the countryside and the sea. 'The landscape is very strong in the film,' says Sellar. 'The village, the countryside and the sea are distinct elements in the script. Moving from one to the other has a very specific effect and I wanted to find somewhere that had these three elements in the right balance. I was also looking for a place which had a strong sense of itself, a working fishing community that was still at one with its world. We looked at every single village on the east coast and when we found Stromness we just knew it was the right place—it didn't look like people's expectations of a Scottish fishing village.'

Stromness also provided *Venus Peter* with its lead actor. 'Once we had decided we wanted a local kid rather than a child actor it was just a matter of seeing every possible child in the Orkney isles.' There are about a thousand children scattered among the islands and Ian Sellar visited schools so remote that they only had two pupils before he found nine-year-old Gordon Strachan at the local school in Stromness. 'Gordon has been very exciting to direct because the reactions you get from a child as opposed to a trained actor are always real and often Gordon will deliver a line in a way that gives it a life I never anticipated when I wrote it.'

'Kids are great to work with,' agrees

Ray McNally. 'Children enter into the fiction with a simplicity that we actors are dying to recapture.' The relationship between Peter and his grandfather is a key chord in the film, which is why McNally took on the part. 'There's a tremendous bond between the grandfather and the boy,' he says. 'They both look on the thirty to fifty-year-olds as being a strange generation who are fussed and worried about so many things which the kid hasn't yet got around to worrying about and the grandfather has gone well past worrying about. In the film that relationship between the grandfather and the boy is a very beautiful thing.'

On set, Ray McNally and Gordon Strachan appear equally at home in Stromness and at ease in each other's company. Together they make the rest of the cast and crew seem somehow out of place. Like Ian Sellar, Christopher Rush and Gordon Strachan, McNally was born and grew up in a small community, a coastal fishing village in Donegal. 'I feel very at home in that world of lobster pots and nets and oars and wharfs and piers and things like that. I love it and like anyone who's born near the sea, I feel slightly uncomfortable and ill at ease if I'm not near the sea.'

From the vantage point of Stromness, the sea appears not as an infinite expanse but, broken up as it is by tiny islands, it seems both at one with the land and, according to the light, a world apart. For the crew everything depends on the light, which together with the landscape defines Peter's physical world.

In Orkney the sky is in constant flux and this ever changing quality of light has alternately frustrated and rewarded the film-makers. 'Sometimes it's been absolutely hell,' admits Gabriel Beristain, the cinematographer for whom the Orcadian light has created a series of headaches relieved by an occasional opportunity to capture the sublime. 'Once or twice these unpredictable changes have given us a stunning quality of light. We have been in a situation where it was terribly overcast and suddenly behind us the sky would open up, lighting the scene brilliantly in the foreground while preserving the dark storm clouds in the background. That's a marvellous condition for shooting, but it's so fleeting that you have to be there to catch it immediately. A couple of times we've been lucky.'

'We did lose the ability to cover certain scenes the way I wanted because of problems with light,' says Ian Sellar. 'But I've got most of what I was after plus something extra—an atmosphere, a quality of movement that comes from the landscape and the light. You can't write that into a script. You can't think it through before you start to shoot. That sense of transition is an entirely filmic thing. It's why we came to Orkney in the first place.'

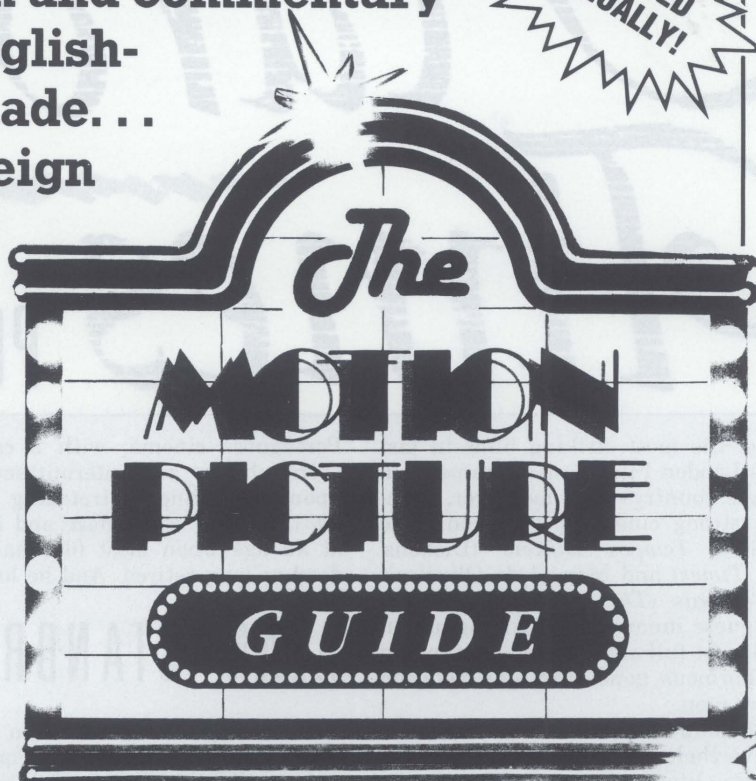
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Hard Times for PORTUGUESE CINEMA

Two of the most striking films in last year's London Film Festival came from a single country—one, moreover, without a strong cinematic tradition. João Botelho's *Tempos Difíceis* (Dickens' *Hard Times*) and Manoel de Oliveira's *Os Canibais* (*The Cannibals*) showed Portuguese innovation and imagination working at full stretch notwithstanding the enormous generation gap between the two men.

Botelho, no longer quite young at 40, is nevertheless the leading figure of the cine-literate generation of the late 1960s that cut its teeth on cine-clubs and cinémathèques. De Oliveira, twice Botelho's age, is the doyen of

Portuguese cinema, with a career as extraordinary and intermittent as the Spaniard Buñuel's stretching back to 1931. He can still amaze and infuriate at an age when most film-makers are dead or long retired. And he looks fifty

ALAN STANBROOK

if he's a day. The Pesaro film festival, which last year mounted a Portuguese retrospective, never made an apter choice than when it gave him a special award as the best young director of 1988.

Coming hot on the heels of José Alvaro Morais' *O Bobo* (*The Jester*) in the previous year, and some interesting recent work by João César Monteiro and António-Pedro Vasconcelos, these films could be mistaken for the stirrings of the next new wave in film history. Unfortunately, the truth belies it. The outlook for film production and distribution in Portugal is bleak, despite the existence of an established state-run film fund that partly finances domestic movies.

Good Portuguese films are generally made as co-productions with other countries. Inflation has raised the average cost of film production almost twenty-

Hard Times.



fold to around 60 million escudos (about £225,000) since 1974. More elaborate movies, like some of de Oliveira's costume pictures, clearly cost more, and it is no surprise that all his recent work has been at least partly financed from non-Portuguese sources. *The Cannibals* is produced by Paulo Branco, who has offices in Paris as well as Lisbon, in association with the French tv channel La Sept, a stream of co-financiers in Rome, Geneva and Frankfurt and with assistance from the Portuguese Film Institute, Portuguese Radio and Television and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

De Oliveira's previous film, *My Case*, was filmed in Nantes with assistance from Raúl Ruiz's outfit, and for the mammoth version of Claudel's play *The Satin Slipper* he augmented funds from the Portuguese Film Institute and the Ministry of Culture with French, German and Swiss money. Cannon was involved in that film, too, in the days when the company was flirting with culture, but the length (360 minutes for tv; 169 minutes for the cinema) must have frightened Cannon off because it has never released the film in Britain.

João Botelho is in principle opposed to co-productions because of the need to dub the players. He seems, however, to have made an exception for *Hard Times*, since in this film he used a British performer in one of the main roles and entered into a co-production deal with the British distributor and exhibitor Artificial Eye in order to get the film made. Artificial Eye's chief contribution was to obtain for Botelho the black-and-white film stock that is, in effect, the cornerstone of the film and the source of the gleaming, diamond-hard photography that gives the movie the look of a silent classic.

Hard Times has been seen in Portugal, but it is one of the lucky ones. Thanks to the structure of the industry there, by no means all domestic pictures are released. Some enjoy only a kind of half-life as they make their way round the festival circuits, attract a little international comment and then sink into obscurity. Table 1 shows the disparity between production and distribution since 1974. The picture is not quite as bad now as it was in, say, the late 1970s, but even as recently as 1985, less than half the year's domestic production was released at home. The reason is that there is almost no history of commercial film production in Portugal. Almost all the films that are made are essentially art-house pictures and thought to appeal only to elitist audiences. Of the 250-odd films released each year, approximately 70 per cent are American.

Movie-going has never been a popular form of entertainment in Portugal—for somewhat surprising reasons. During the long reign of Salazar, dubbing was forbidden. All foreign pictures had to be subtitled, but a large part of the rural population was illiterate. Hence the concentration of cinemas in the big

TABLE 1
Portuguese film production since 1974

	Films completed	Films released
1975	6	5
1976	10	3
1977	12	3
1978	12	4
1979	6	4
1980	10	5
1981	10	6
1982	7	4
1983	4	4
1984	9	8
1985	8	3
1986	7	4
1987	7	5

TABLE 2
Portuguese film attendances
since 1970

	Number of spectators ('000)
1970	27,971
1971	27,180
1972	28,065
1973	28,914
1974	35,684
1975	41,593
1976	42,812
1977	39,145
1978	34,038
1979	32,609
1980	30,765
1981	30,339
1982	27,278
1983	24,278
1984	18,795
1985	18,984
1986	18,523

Source: National Institute of Statistics

TABLE 3
Investment of Portuguese Film Institute
in production

	Amount*
1974	11,177
1975	44,646
1976	56,781
1977	57,781
1978	30,477
1979	88,157
1980	68,378
1981	109,673
1982	136,191
1983	108,169
1984	107,726
1985	163,028
1986	225,612
1987	181,319

* Thousands of Escudos
Source: Portuguese Film Institute

cities. Portugal now has about 370 cinemas, but nearly half are in Lisbon and the suburbs. Attendances picked up briefly after the 1974 revolution because censorship was abolished and audiences for the first time could see films uncut. Table 2 shows the big blip in attendances that took place in 1975 and 1976, but since then the pattern has been downhill almost every year. It's not a good climate in which to do imaginative work.

Portuguese film-makers have long had to live with a system nominally designed to protect and encourage local culture but in practice often inimical to it. Law 2027 of 1948, a millstone round the industry's neck until April 1974, strengthened the hand of the censor, ensured that only right-wing film-makers would be eligible for state subventions, controlled the unions and cosseted the big-city exhibitors.

Later the Portuguese Film Institute was established under legislation of 1971 (law 7/71), with a brief to discipline all work in the film industry in the fields of production, distribution and exhibition and to 'relaunch and regulate the country's cinema business as a means of artistic expression, an instrument of culture and of public entertainment.' The Institute came into operation two years later and is linked administratively to the office of the Secretary of State for Culture. Its funds are drawn partly from a levy on imported films but mostly from a 15 per cent tax added to the price of cinema tickets.

The contraction in audiences for Portuguese films has led to the virtual disappearance of private producers—and of any trace of a star system. Would-be Portuguese film-makers are therefore almost entirely reliant on state support, either through the Film Institute or through Portuguese Radio and Television. One other source of funds has been the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, which has invested money in films as an exercise in cultural support. The Foundation put some money into *The Cannibals*, for example. But the sums are relatively small. Effectively, film-makers have to depend on the government.

Since the military coup of 25 April 1974, Portugal has shifted towards a right-of-centre government. The present administration of Anibal Cavaco Silva is nearly halfway through a four-year term in which it holds a working majority over all other parties. Before 1987, his Social Democrats formed a minority government, but they are now back in full force with 140 of the 250 seats in parliament. Mr Cavaco Silva, who admires Mrs Thatcher, is intent on pursuing Thatcherite policies in Portugal. His administration has seen the rise of the *nouveaux riches* and a drift towards rampant capitalism. Film-makers with a bone to pick and something to say are likely to find it still harder under this regime to get adequate backing unless they can line up part of the finance from overseas.

All the more reason to celebrate the two fine Portuguese films (both with something to say) that appeared in the past year. *Hard Times*, taken from a nineteenth-century novel, and *The Cannibals*, cast in the form of an eighteenth-century opera, are both, in fact, highly relevant to twentieth-century Portugal.

Botelho's Dickens movie updates the action from the last century to unspecified 'modern times'. It is hard to put a finger on the date but we are clearly meant to regard the events as germane to our own times. Indeed, Botelho emphasises this by focusing in the credits on the frontispiece of Dickens' text, bearing the novel's full title—*Hard Times for These Times*.

Long regarded as one of Dickens' weakest novels, careless in characterisation and motivation and with the principal figures little more than ciphers, *Hard Times* has subsequently been the subject of a valiant attempt at rehabilitation by F. R. Leavis. Whether or not we accept it as the masterpiece Leavis takes it to be, it is an undeniably powerful essay in the workings of the class struggle and the consequences of neglecting the imagination in favour of a strict utilitarianism.

This is a picture of a society being brought up not to care, to know the social pecking order and to avoid stepping out of line. Dickens had no real understanding of or sympathy with trade unions, but he knew his uncaring capitalist. Have things changed so much since then? There's a sardonic scene in the novel, used intact in the film, in which a 'scab', who refuses to join a strike out of a sense of obligation to his employer, is sent to Coventry by his workmates and then fired by his boss, who would rather have all the men out than a single maverick to cause bad feeling later.

One of the virtues of Botelho's adap-

tation is that it plays fair by Dickens, yet makes the work seem entirely plausible in a modern setting. The plot and much of the dialogue are taken over unmodified from the text. For the British subtitles even the original Dickens names are preserved. Nothing is added, little is omitted, less changed—though Stephen Blackpool's death in a street accident (a victim of progress) rather than by falling down a well may be taken, on the whole, as an improvement. The only anachronism is the retention of a line in which the factory manager threatens the strikers with deportation to the penal colonies.

Botelho regards almost none of the characters as sympathetic. They are oppressors, oppressed or deluded. The only exception is the orphaned Sissy Jupe who, by dint of natural goodness and clear-sightedness, moves steadily towards a state of happiness. It is she who, in novel and film, sees through the code of utilitarianism and is left at last to enjoy the delights of family life that are denied to her friend and adoptive sister, Louisa Gradgrind. The last scene of the film, in which the two girls discuss the possibility of happiness, crystallises Dickens' theme in a single electrifying close-up. 'Are you happy?' Sissy asks Louisa. Married by her father to a man she did not love, widowed, childless and alone, Louisa turns to the camera and the frame freezes on a stark, minatory stare that seems to implicate us all. There's no room for happiness in her world, she seems to be saying, and we should be ashamed of ourselves that it is so.

Louisa Gradgrind is played by Julia Britton, a non-professional actress who had met Botelho while working on the film production side for Cinema Action. Botelho directed her as Bresson or Straub might have done. She has described how the director went to great lengths to iron out gesture and business from the performance. From her and

other non-professionals in the cast he sought a minimalist acting style. These non-professionals include Joaquim Mendes, a civil servant in real life, as Stephen Blackpool, and Luís Estrela as Louisa's brother Thomas. Estrela was in reality a geography student.

In *Hard Times*, however, the acting is deliberately inconsistent. Henrique Viana, who plays the factory manager Josiah Bounderby, comes from vaudeville, while Ruy Furtado and Eunice Muñoz (Thomas Gradgrind and Mrs Sparsit) are from the legitimate theatre. Eunice Muñoz, the Edith Evans, as it were, of the Lisbon stage, is encouraged to give a performance of barnstorming melodramatics in sharp contrast to all the other performers in the film. Some will welcome the reminder that the text is, after all, part of the tradition of Victorian melodrama; others may regard the mugging as obtrusive.

The effect might be likened to Tod Slaughter making an unheralded appearance in a film by Ozu or Bresson. The analogies are not fanciful because the influence of both these artists is unmistakable. One of the *tours de force* of Dickens' novel was the description of Coketown, the northern industrial location in which the action is set. Botelho transfers the action to the no less symbolic World's End and shoots it from a distance with the almost transcendental quality that Ozu brought to his industrial landscapes; here are tall smokestacks dominating the scene in neat, symmetrical rows, trains mysteriously trundling across the screen in long shot, on their way to who knows where, and the deserted streets and corridors that the camera holds in frame long after the characters have left the shot, daring us to say there is nothing more to see.

At the same time, in close-up and medium shot, Botelho achieves compositions that would not look out of place in any of the black-and-white films by the director of *Un Condamné à Mort s'est*

Hard Times: Julia Britton (Louisa Gradgrind).





The Cannibals.

Echappé. There's a shot of Stephen Blackpool bowed down on the staircase, with only his back visible against the peeling, impersonal walls, that anyone might mistake for an image by Bresson. And might we not take the shots of Louisa standing against the wall, with only a hanging crucifix for company, for a frame, say, from *Le Journal d'un Curé de Campagne*?

Not that *Hard Times* is in any conspicuous way a religious film. But Botelho evidently has strong preferences and they colour his way of looking at the world. The deathbed episodes are shot like scenes from von Stroheim and there's an undisguised nod to Hitchcock in the spotlight that illuminates the poisoned bottle beside the bed of Stephen's wife, just as it does the glass on Cary Grant's tray in *Suspicion*. You can find other echoes, too—the wedding scene when Bounderby kisses his wife's foot like some fugitive from *L'Age d'Or* and the massing crowds in the strike scene, shot from overhead to emphasise the sheer weight of numbers in the manner of Fritz Lang. Everything, though, is so well integrated that the film never seems like a collection of self-conscious *hommages*. They are there to be seen if you have an eye for such things, but never call attention to themselves or slow down the narrative.

What is eye-catching is the extent to which Botelho has attempted to mimic the photographic texture of silent cinema. This is a black-and-white film with those glinting contrasts and chiaroscuro that everyone seemed to be able to manage in those days. *Hard Times* looks (but, of course, doesn't sound) like a spanking new print of a film which might have been shot in the mid-1920s. Note the first time that we are introduced to Stephen's drunken wife, sitting in an alcoholic heap by the wall. In an intricate maze of cross lighting and shadows, a spotlight picks out her features as if this were the most natural arrangement of light in the

world. And in the night scene, when Mrs Sparsit spies on what she thinks are guilty lovers, the lighting keeps all the characters clearly in focus throughout an enormously wide and deep composition.

Some have said that if Dickens were alive today he might have written and directed for the cinema just like this. Botelho could justifiably take that as a compliment. He's keen to get back to what he calls the dignity of the early days of cinema. Griffith remains one of his idols and he fully supports Eisenstein's contention that Dickens was already in many respects a movie-maker ahead of his time. 'Dickens' nearness to the characteristics of cinema in method, style, and especially in viewpoint and exposition, is indeed amazing,' Eisenstein wrote in 1944. João Botelho would second that.

Hard Times is Botelho's third feature, after *Conversa Acabada* in 1980 and *Um Adeus Português* (*A Portuguese Farewell*) in 1985—a two-part picture in black-and-white and colour that was the first to tackle the knotty subject of the colonial wars. *The Cannibals* is only Manoel de Oliveira's tenth feature film in a career spanning 58 years. The common thread in his best work, however, which includes *O Passado e O Presente* (*The Past and The Present*, 1971), *Amor de Perdição* (*Love of Perdition*, 1978) and *Francisca* (1981), is a formal elegance that one might call Mozartian. They are not (at least until now) operatic films, but they work in the same way as operas do, with the moving camera performing the function of arias, recitative and counterpoint. These are movies that are so fluid they almost seem to sing. There are other films like that—Ophüls' *La Ronde* for example, and Bergman's *Smiles of a Summer Night*.

The Cannibals takes the analogy to its limits—it actually is an opera. At least, of sorts. With a score by João

Paes, who ran Lisbon's opera house, the Teatro Nacional de São Carlos, for seven years and who studied composing with Joly Braga Santos at Lisbon University, it is an entirely sung adaptation of a nineteenth-century Portuguese story that effects variations on the Don Giovanni theme.

The opera, it has to be said, is not up to much. The music is undernourished and the extended first section of the film is all manner and not much matter. Depicting the wedding of a beautiful young woman to the Viscount d'Aveleda at what appears to be some time in the eighteenth century, it reproduces the conventions of opera without the gift of melody. But nothing is quite what it seems. The guests drive up in limos, the electric lights are ablaze and the gentlemen wear toppers, which surely, one asks, were not *de rigueur* in Mozart's day. The effect is as disorienting as the comparable scene at the start of the wartime German version of *The Adventures of Baron Münchhausen* by Josef von Baky. It ought to alert us that the operatic posing and posturing amid a ballroom scene of overdressed aristocrats which would surely have pleased Visconti is not the way the film will necessarily develop. Having taxed the patience of non-opera-buffs to the limit, de Oliveira then pulls the rug from under everybody's feet and sends the film skittering off into black comedy.

The groom, it seems, has good reason for the hangdog expression he wears throughout the wedding. It's not just that Don Giovanni is outside in the garden trying to woo his bride; the truth is that he himself is a walking prosthesis and all his limbs and members have to be unscrewed and hung up on the bed-rail at the end of the day. On learning which, his bride swoons quite away and topples out of the window, leaving her husband of a few hours to curse his fate and hurl his torso into the blazing hearth.

So far de Oliveira's satire has been at the expense only of the more absurd elements of opera. In the third and most rib-tickling section, however, he goes beyond opera into a lampoon of the upper crust themselves. Comes the dawn and the groom has mysteriously disappeared, but there's a delicious roast cooking in the fireplace. The father of the bride and his two sons, hungry after the exertions of the night before, fall to with relish.

From here on the film abandons the last vestiges of realism and becomes an irreverent knees up, with the guests turning into hogs and dancing their way into infinity, while a fountain and a violin see them off to the strains of a playful duet. So art at the end reasserts itself and it is the ignoble and the effete who dance their way to the grave. Come to think of it, that's a theme that's not so far from *Don Giovanni* after all. It shows de Oliveira at 80 years of age as deft and witty a scourge of the idle rich as he was in *The Past and the Present*, when he was a mere lad of 62. Thank God for his overseas connections. ■

AGNES VARDA

THE GAZE OF THE MEDUSA?



JILL FORBES

Jane Birkin, Agnès Varda.

Agnès Varda is a major filmmaker whose career spans some thirty years. Her films are always interesting and sometimes controversial, yet in Britain they are often simply ignored. Frequently, in fact, Varda is literally invisible, either because her movies do not find a distributor, as is the case with the recent *Jane B. par Agnès V.* and *Kung Fu Master*, or, more subtly, through a damaging critical silence. Indeed, only *Sans Toit ni Loi* (1985) has received anything like critical acclaim.

How does one explain the fact that a film such as *Kung Fu Master*, half of which takes place in Britain and which presents a portrait of a British theatrical family, has not aroused the slightest interest in this country? It would seem that Varda has always had a struggle to make her mark here. Back in 1967, it may be recalled, she was one of the six directors who collaborated on Chris Marker's *Loin du Viêt-Nam*, but re-reading the British reviews one would be forgiven for being unaware of her contribution. The others (Godard, Ivens, Klein, Lelouch and Resnais) all get a

mention in at least some of the reviews, but Varda does not even figure in the *Monthly Film Bulletin*, whose brief was to provide an objective summary of the films it reviewed.

The silence is so systematic that Varda's exclusion must be related to the fact that she is a woman. Yet if unreconstructed sexism on the part of British reviewers in 1967 could be explained—though not excused—by the fact that the women's movement had only just begun to raise consciousness at the time, it might be argued that today there are festivals of women's films, women's film co-ops and that there is a premium on being a woman director. Nevertheless, none of this has benefited Varda. The difficulty with her films, it seems, is that they are not merely by a woman, their problematic is women, and that they present a view of women which is too original, or perhaps too personal, to be widely acceptable even, or especially, among women.

Her second feature *Cléo de 5 à 7*, made in 1962, is a good point from which to begin reassessing Varda's work. This film attracted much praise when it came

out for its technical virtuosity, its use of virtual 'real time' to present a two-hour period in the life of a young, beautiful and successful singer as she awaits the results of a test which will tell her whether or not she has cancer. Some women, on the other hand, found the film offensive because *Cléo* is portrayed as flighty, superstitious, superficial, spoiled and infantile. This is how Françoise Giroud put it at the time: 'Is she beautiful? More likely, her mind has gone to sleep, she is dead to the world, an object. For some people she is WOMAN. For others nothing, and she had better keep quiet!'

Twenty years on, Françoise Audé, in her study of women in the French cinema, found *Cléo* even harder to take: 'She moves from being a desirable object to a subject, but this movement is hardly perceptible.' She goes on to talk of Varda's 'mawkish elegance', her 'pronounced taste for adjectives which decorate rather than describe', a taste which is related to 'forms, colours, subjects and forms of behaviour which are "feminine" [but] a femininity which comes from being conditioned to the "cute", the

"graceful" and the "pretty" rather than the beautiful.'

Alas, poor Cléo! These critics are right. In the first half of the film she is beautiful but odious, indulged by all around her, hypochondriac, extravagant. Yet these two hours represent a journey of self-discovery: the first part shows us Cléo as she presents herself and as others perceive her, in the Tarot cards, the innumerable mirrors which reflect her image, in the café, in the hat shop, as the patient who is elongated on her bed to receive her musicians, as a voice on the radio to the taxi-driver. In the second part of the film she removes her disguises and emerges, incognito, to her real identity. Two distractions then occur. First, she visits the cinema with a friend whose boyfriend is the projectionist and they watch a silent comedy which makes Cléo laugh. Then she meets a soldier in the park and, after some hesitation, unburdens her anxieties to him. He in turn explains that he is on leave from Algeria and tells her how much he hates his military service. They take a bus, go to a café and Cléo is so entertained that she misses her hospital appointment, so the revelation that she does indeed have cancer is a terrible anti-climax.

The transformation is probably too rapid to be completely convincing, although those who are about to die do act in unexpected ways. What cannot be maintained, however, is that Varda's portrait of Cléo is sympathetic or that the film-maker implicitly identifies with her subject. Cléo is a medical specimen and Varda's gaze is cold and clinical. Cléo has an erotico-narcissistic relationship with her body and her voice, but the film-maker's relationship to her is not erotic. She is an object of documentary interest rather than a sex object.

It is rare to find the female body displayed as an object of curiosity rather than desire, but in Varda's films it is quite common. This attitude is related to her early career as a photographer, and is most evident in her documentaries, which are virtually unknown in Britain, but it took on polemical force with the advent of the women's movement in the 1970s. Varda, whose first job was to take publicity stills for the TNP, remains fascinated with early photography—indeed, she lives in the rue Daguerre—and its pretensions to reveal truth. In *Daguerrotypes* (1975), a series of 'snapshots' of the shopkeepers in her road, she explores the confines of the lives of these conventional people through the 'cliché', the posed, framed and conventional image, the 'typicality' of the daguerrotype.

This film has a fictional equivalent in one episode of *L'Une Chante, l'Autre Pas* (1976) where Suzanne's lover, a photographer, kills himself because he encounters in Pauline a woman who will not, as all others have, give herself to the camera however he poses and frames her. Varda's early documentaries such as *Du Côté de la Côte* and *L'Opéra-Mouffe* (1958) are extremely lyrical (as the title of the latter suggests), but

gradually her style becomes more austere and she moves towards a montage either of fixed images or of images which are fixed framed with voice-over commentary usually delivered by herself, slightly too rapidly and in a dry and rather detached although witty manner.

Images of women have thus become extremely problematical. Although in *Lions Love* (1968) Viva and her partners Jim and Jerry willingly expose themselves to the camera, indeed cavort endlessly in front of it, Viva touchingly remarks that she had hoped this was going to be a real movie, that is to say a fiction with lines to learn and lots of romance, while the film-maker Shirley Clarke finds herself too inhibited to act a suicide attempt, saying 'it isn't me' to the suggestion she should simulate an overdose. In fact, the lessons of the flower children were well learned. Obiter dicta from Viva such as 'in a sea of ugliness a good-looking politician is not to be sneezed at' (of Bobby Kennedy), or 'that was in the days before unisex

when men were men and women were waitresses' or Jim Rado's sweatshirt which sports the motto 'e pluribus unum' could not be translated to Europe.

Hence *Réponse de Femmes*, the 'cinetract' French TV commissioned from Varda in 1973, treats its subjects coldly and distantly. Varda lines up her women directly in front of the camera in medium shot while her voice asks, 'What is a woman's body?' Then she suggests that 'Woman has to be reinvented', and one of the women is shown naked in front of the camera, framed in exactly the same way, reciting her political demands quite imperturbably and with no change of tone. It is an intentionally de-eroticised image whose effect of surprise is all the greater for being intercut with a shot of an erect penis (excised by the censor). There is all the difference in the world between floating naked on a lilo in a pool in California and standing foursquare in front of a camera in a bare television studio without any clothes on. Where *Lions Love* was, indeed, 'unisex',

Corinne Marchand in *Cléo de 5 à 7*: 'an object of documentary interest'.
Below: Sandrine Bonnaire in *Sans Toit ni Loi*.



with the men as indifferently naked as Viva, both *Réponse de Femmes* and *Les Dites Caryatides* play, however briefly, on the scandalous effect of the eroticised male body and contrast this with the assumption that the female body cannot be but that.

Les Dites Caryatides opens with the statement 'the nude in the street is more often in stone than in the flesh' over a shot of the backview of a naked man walking through the streets of Paris which is simultaneously comic and shocking. We then move to the subject of the documentary, which is a study of the caryatids that adorn the late nineteenth-century apartment blocks in Paris: 'a caryatid is a certain idea of woman in architecture.' Indeed, it is a nineteenth-century idea of woman, suggests Varda by quoting Baudelaire's *La Beauté*, 'Je suis belle, ô mortels, comme un rêve de pierre.' For these ladies, whose forms are often sinuous, who are often extravagantly decorated, who are always more than lifesize—indeed, one in the rue Turbigo runs the whole height of the building—have been struck in stone as though the gaze of the artist were that of the Medusa. Thus *Les Dites Caryatides* (1984) shares all the lyricism of the early documentaries but, unfortunately, its subjects are unfeeling: 'Connaissez-vous l'angoisse? Connaissez-vous la haine?'

In Varda's films the female body is an object for the camera to inspect as well as to frame. She seeks its extended form, either in sculpture or in architecture like the caryatids, or by posing her leading ladies, Viva or Jane Birkin, as a Venus out of Titian or Goya. Indeed, in *Jane B. par Agnès V.* we are given the reason why she, and Viva before her, should have appealed to Varda. Both women achieved *succès de scandale* through nude film appearances (Viva for Warhol, Birkin in *Blowup*); both women as a result became icons of the 1960s. In pastiching their iconic roles by making them adopt well-known poses or, in the case of Birkin, by parodying one of her *Playboy* spreads, Varda strips these

images of their sexual charge and the viewer of his and her bearings. What emotions are aroused by an imitation classical Venus? What kind of a Venus is Sandrine Bonnaire emerging from the waves in *Sans Toit ni Loi* to immerse herself in a life of dirt, squalor and ultimately self-destruction?

It is probably only in *Cléo de 5 à 7* and *Le Bonheur* (1964) that the viewer-voyeur is matched by a narcissistic woman, and even in these films the narrative subverts the protagonists' own pleasure in their bodies. Thereafter, Varda employs a variety of devices to come between the viewer and his pleasure: a refusal of close-ups, the mocking commentary, the parody and the pastiche. The narrative technique of her films becomes less straightforward and her features tend to incorporate documentary elements.

In *Sans Toit ni Loi*, which is the most tightly constructed of her narratives, the central character hardly speaks and the film is composed of a series of views of her. The curiosity she arouses comes, paradoxically, from her repulsiveness. In *Jane B. par Agnès V.* the story told is that of Jane Birkin's life, a portrait of a woman of forty in her own words (more or less), of her children, her house and her ambitions. But it is intercut with fictional excursions: Jane as the star of a silent comedy, Jane as porn queen, Jane as a Renaissance Venus and so on. Birkin is both a 'real' woman and another specimen coldly examined through the camera.

In *L'Une Chante, l'Autre Pas* the fictional thread, a friendship between Suzanne and Pomme over a decade or so, is woven through the enactment of key episodes in the women's movement. The Bobigny trial in 1972, which mobilised French women in defence of a mother who had obtained an abortion for her teenage daughter, victim of a rape, is also the moment when Pomme and Suzanne realise that their continuing friendship and mutual support is central to their lives.

However, *L'Une Chante, l'Autre Pas* is, with *Cléo*, the film which has aroused most criticism of Varda from women. The explicit reason is that the story of the two women's friendship and the events of their lives is presented melodramatically, with both the good and the bad exaggerated to the point where they become incredible, and that Varda's alleged inability to confront life and to see things as they really are is compounded by her aesthetic choices, her willingness to prettify, to decorate the sets of the film in bright colours, to place, as it were, a set of rose-tinted spectacles on her camera. *L'Une Chante* is no more a naturalistic film than it is a conventional fiction. It is closely related to *Daguerrotypes* and both its narrative structure and its aesthetic codes are more appropriately seen as a montage of 'clichés'. Life, for Suzanne and Pomme, is like the series of old-fashioned postcards they exchange over the decade which enable them to freeze and look back over episodes in their lives.

The other reason why *L'Une Chante* has not been well received is that it is a hymn to pregnancy. Part of the aesthetic exuberance of the film derives from Pomme's round shape—hence her adopted name—and the images of fecundity which surround her. Many viewers have found this embarrassing or politically unacceptable, but it is a recurrent theme in Varda's films from *L'Opéra-Mouffe*, which charts the stages in a pregnancy, to the discussions of child-bearing in *Lions Love*, to Jane Birkin's regret at not having a son, to the shots of the pregnant woman in *Réponse de Femmes*. It is a social and aesthetic choice which is supremely unfashionable, for Varda's own films make the point that the lanky Birkin and the emaciated Viva are the icons of our age.

Thus Varda's aesthetic is specifically female and very different from, if not alien to, that of the mass media which simultaneously de-sexualise and eroticise women's bodies. This political point also allows Varda to make a link between women and other marginal groups. The Chicano murals in Los Angeles that she examines in *Murs Murs* (1980) have all the colour, exuberance and, indeed, unexpectedness that *L'Une Chante* finds among women. These murals are street paintings executed by 'the forgotten people of California', the people who make the Hollywood lives possible. They are a way for the oppressed to find a voice (to 'murmur'); 'mural', says Varda, 'means, I exist.' They have a naturalness and spontaneity which is worth a hundred *Playboy* spreads.

Agnès Varda remains one of the few film-makers who is both aesthetically and intellectually challenging. Her films never comfort the viewer and they are sometimes hard to watch. They are often very radical as well. Her most recent *Kung Fu Master* casts Jane Birkin as a middle-aged woman who falls in love with a fourteen-year-old boy—a subject tailor-made, one imagines, to frighten British distributors. ■

Kung Fu Master: Charlotte Gainsbourg, Mathieu Demy.



MALLE X 4

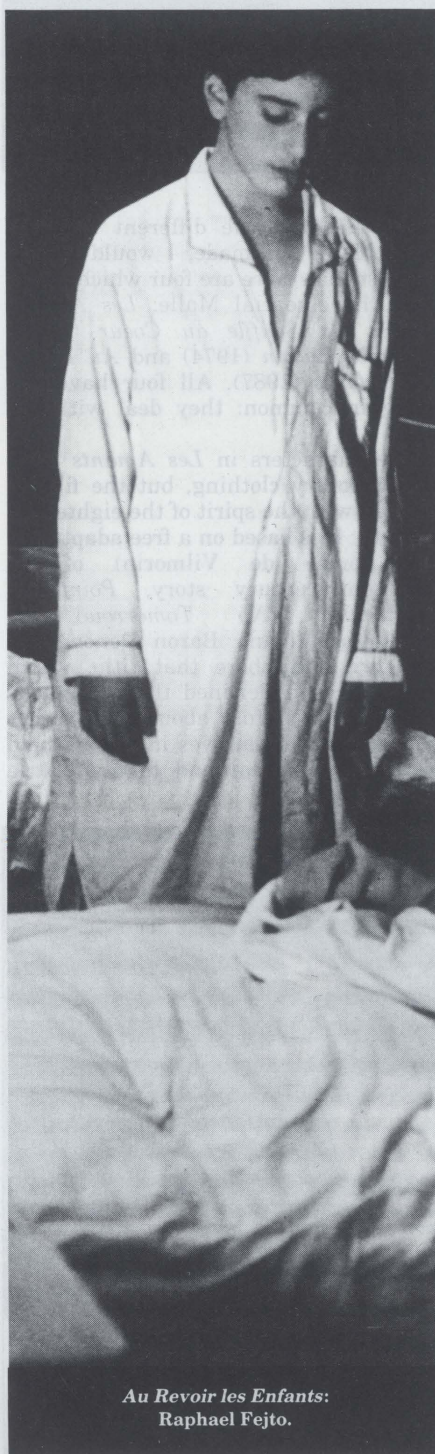
RICHARD ROUD on 'the audacities of a shy man'

Au Revoir les Enfants has been perhaps Louis Malle's most successful film. It took the Grand Prix at the 1987 Venice Film Festival, was nominated for two Oscars, collected a clutch of Césars and won one of the first European Film Awards (for best script); it has been received everywhere with great critical acclaim. Malle has been making films for more than thirty years. His first feature, *Lift to the Scaffold* (1957), antedated by a year or so the first films of Godard, Truffaut and Chabrol; and his films made in America (*Pretty Baby*, *Atlantic City*, etc) and India (the documentary series) demonstrate a range and versatility beyond that of most, if not all, his French contemporaries. And yet, for all this, Malle has never quite made it into the critical pantheon; no one seems to think of him as a great director.

There are reasons for this, some of them valid, most of them not. In France, both Malle's colleagues and the critical establishment have tended to resent the fact that he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth, a spoon heaped high with sugar. His mother was born a Beghin, and her family is one of the largest sugar producers in France. As Malle himself said in the interview book *Louis Malle par Louis Malle* (1978):

'The milieu from which I came was above all that of money, of the power of money. And I dragged that ball and chain for a long time. When I went to the IDHEC I carefully tried to hide where I came from. And more particularly, I wanted to be financially independent of my family. I began earning my living in the cinema at twenty with Cousteau. And I lived for years in a studio flat in Place Pigalle, cut off from my family. But after I shot my first films, people learned of my origins.

'I had the reputation of being one of those daddy's boys who make films with their parents' money. That made me indignant to an absurd degree. I went crazy with rage every time an interviewer asked me that question. It wasn't defamatory but it was a little contemptuous, as if I made films just to amuse myself.' He pointed out that Jean



Au Revoir les Enfants:
Raphael Fejto.

Renoir financed his first films by selling some of his father's paintings. 'And yet, no one ever dreamt of reproaching him for that. My first films were financed in the conventional way with money from distributors.'

Here perhaps Malle was being a little disingenuous. It is easier to borrow money—or to raise it—if everyone knows that the borrower has an immensely rich family behind him; the debts will be made good somehow. Nor did Malle really have to worry about whether his films were financially successful; he wouldn't go hungry and he would never have to direct films he didn't want to make in order to survive. His family background, in any other sense, ought to be irrelevant. In France, however, it did—and still does—play a role in people's perception of his work. The fact that he was also good-looking didn't help.

Few people outside France probably knew anything about Louis Malle's background. What has kept him from being properly appreciated as a director may be that he has made so many different kinds of films, including shifting back and forth between fiction and documentary, in which he began. What is wrong with this? Well, as any Marxist* could tell us (and I seem to remember that Marx himself wrote about this matter), painters and writers (and filmmakers) produce commodities. To be successful, these commodities must not vary too much from their predecessors. Painters are often urged by their galleries not to change styles: clients want to buy something that looks like, say, a Manet or a Hockney. Malle has not obliged by giving his films a 'look' to please the customers.

Success came very early to Malle: at the age of 24, he found himself the winner (with Jacques Cousteau) of the Golden Palm awarded by the 1956 Cannes Film Festival to *The World of Silence*. Malle maintains that the award

*Marxians think the word Marxist is pejorative. A Marxist, for them, is someone who believes in Marx's writings as others believe in the Bible or the Koran. Marxians, on the other hand, think of Marx's works as a valid point of departure for new thinking.



Jeanne Moreau in *Les Amants*.

was the result of a compromise, and this may well be true. Two of the outstanding films at Cannes that year were *Smiles of a Summer Night* and *Pather Panchali*, both of which were fobbed off with oddly named prizes. For the first and last time, a Prize for Poetic Humour went to Bergman, and a Prize for the Best Human Document to Satyajit Ray. The term 'Poetic Humour' was apparently invented by one of the jurors, Louise de Vilmorin, author of, among other works, *Madame de...* and who was to be the adapter and scriptwriter for Malle's *Les Amants*. She was such a grandly eighteenth-century sort of person that when she died, her last lover, André Malraux, was informed of her death (he was staying at her chateau) by the majordomo in the following words: 'Monsieur le Ministre, Madame la Comtesse est morte.'

In spite of all the different kinds of films Malle has made, I would like to suggest that there are four which represent the essential Malle: *Les Amants* (1958), *Le Souffle au Coeur* (1971), *Lacombe Lucien* (1974) and *Au Revoir les Enfants* (1987). All four have one thing in common: they deal with the past.

The characters in *Les Amants* wear contemporary clothing, but the film is imbued with the spirit of the eighteenth century. It is based on a free adaptation (by Louise de Vilmorin) of an eighteenth-century story, *Point de Lendemain* (No Tomorrow) by Dominique-Vivant, Baron Denon. The film originally bore that title, which would have underlined the ambiguous ending of this story about an innocent young man who arrives in a household of rich, superficial and highly brittle

people, and, unlike Jurieu in Renoir's *La Règle du Jeu*, not only sets out alive, but takes his hostess (Jeanne Moreau) with him; at least for the time being. Although there is no overt betrayal (another constant in my Malle), one doubts whether Moreau's flight from the comfort of her position will last very long. Malle's background—*la très grande bourgeoisie*—must have been helpful in making the film so believable; Louise de Vilmorin's dialogue is aristocratically dry and concise.

Malle's decision to use the Brahms first String Sextet was a stroke of genius, for its sweetly yearning themes give the film a stately, almost solemn pace. This is echoed by the performances. Malle's talent for working with actors was never more triumphant than here in his direction of Jeanne Moreau, his girlfriend at the time (another reason he was envied by his colleagues). After several years of disappointing performances, she here achieved a great one.

One of the defenders of *Les Amants* was François Truffaut, who wrote that Malle had 'all the audacities of a shy man'. Malle is a shy man, or, at least, often fights shy of emotion, and this characteristic has marked his career. As he has said, 'I am convinced that there are two categories of creator: there are those who, very early on, give the best of themselves, and then there are others who never cease throughout their lives slowly, often painfully, to mature.' He mentions Godard and the painter Géricault as examples of the first kind, and himself and Matisse as examples of the second.

If all four of my Malle films are set in the past, three of them deal with the very rich, who, as we know, are not like us. *Murmur of the Heart* is, as Malle has admitted, autobiographical. But, as he is careful to point out, 'that Italian mother [Léa Massari] comes from elsewhere.' So why, then, the incest sequence, if it is not autobiographical? That aspect of the film has been the most decried: psychoanalysts maintain that it just couldn't happen that way. And ordinary folk, too, find it hard to believe that a young man can overcome his sexual timidity by fornicating with his mother—or at least not without some disastrous psychological consequences.

Malle tells us that his script originally contained a scene in which the boy plays with the idea of suicide after the event: he was to toy with a razor in the bathroom. But he decided to drop the scene. Quite wisely, for the incest sequence is clearly a fantasy, something that never happened, but was perhaps dreamed of by the young Malle. This explains why, to put it crudely, Malle got away with it, where Bertolucci in *La Luna* did not. Bertolucci took it seriously and meant it to be taken seriously. And people didn't like it. So many started off their criticism of *La*

Le Souffle au Coeur: Louis Malle with Benoit Ferreux.



Luna by saying, 'Of course, the incest part doesn't bother me at all; that's not what I don't like about the film.' Because I liked the film enormously, and still do, I couldn't help feeling that they were protesting too much; whereas, hardly anyone was troubled by the incest scene in *Murmur of the Heart*. Truffaut's phrase irresistibly returns: 'All the audacities of a shy man.'

Just as the Brahms sextet, as well as the dialogue, pushed *Les Amants* back in time, so *Murmur of the Heart* was firmly anchored in its period by the use of the music of Charlie Parker and Sidney Bechet. *Lacombe Lucien* is dated musically by the gramophone music of Django Reinhardt and the Hot-Club de France and the rendition by Irène Trébert of an Occupation hit: 'Made-moiselle Swing'. In this third of my chosen four, Malle deals with adolescence again—that of a peasant. And the theme of betrayal, which will recur in *Au Revoir les Enfants*, is also important here. But for me the most interesting thing about *Lacombe Lucien* and *Au Revoir les Enfants*, two films about the Occupation, is that Malle is the only director I can think of who has dealt honestly with the attractions of Fascism to the peasant and the proletarian.

Marxists (not Marxians), and indeed many knee-jerk leftists, have always maintained that Fascism was forced on the proletariat by the bourgeoisie. This was simply not true, either in Italy or in Germany. Both Fascists and Nazis were, or pretended to be, Socialists (the very word Nazi is, of course, a contraction of National Socialism). One can still find, near Italian railway stations, buildings labelled 'Dopolavoro'. These were clubs where railway workers spent their leisure time. Built by Mussolini, they stand witness to the attempts of Fascism to do something for the workers. Perhaps it is because Malle was a member of the privileged classes that he could see in Lucien's behaviour, not the scandal that people made it out to be, but simply the 'revenge of the humiliated'.*

The theme of betrayal is less important in *Au Revoir les Enfants* than in *Lacombe Lucien*. Lucien, after all, betrays the Jewish girl, France (Aurore Clément), with whom he is in love and with whom he has had an affair. He finally reacts against the Gestapo and tries to help France and her grandmother to escape. He succeeds in saving them, but the film ends with the ironic execution of Lucien as a traitor to France, the nation, not the girl. Although Joseph, the kitchen porter in *Au Revoir les Enfants*, is not one of the main characters in the film, he is perhaps the most interesting. It is he, again a peasant, who runs the black market in food at the school for rich



Pierre Blaise and Thérèse Giehse in *Lacombe Lucien*.

boys where he works. But when his activities are discovered, it is only he who is punished, while the rich boys who were equally guilty are left alone. The main story, that of the friendship between Julien (an autobiographical portrait of Malle) and Jean (the boy whom he eventually discovers to be Jewish), is moving. The one thing with which one might quarrel is that Julien's 'betrayal' of Jean is involuntary, accidental and therefore irrelevant. One need not dwell too much on this aspect of the film, however, since the rest is so satisfyingly successful.

I have maintained that Malle's best films are those that deal with the past, particularly the three which confront his own past. And Malle is not unaware of this aspect of his work. 'I have never recovered,' he told Christopher Cook, 'from that incident [the 'betrayal' in *Au*

Revoir]. I'm still a child... and I think that the passage from childhood to adulthood is the thing that interests me most.' He even goes so far as to say that 'childhood is the most interesting moment in a man's life.'

His preference for the past (except in his documentaries) is nothing that he need be ashamed of. After all, he is in very good company. By and large, such diverse artists as Henry James, Satyajit Ray and François Truffaut have always been at their best when dealing with the past. As James said somewhere, 'The present doesn't compose.' It has taken Louis Malle a long time to cast off the burden of guilt for having been born rich, but it has been worth waiting for. One can only hope that he will continue to mine this rich lode which has provided the foundation of his most striking films. ■

Au Revoir les Enfants: Malle directs Raphael Fejto and Gaspard Manesse.



*This, and the quotations that follow, is from a programme in the BBC Radio 3 series *Third Ear*, in which Christopher Cook talked to Louis Malle (17 October 1988).

La *Petite Voleuse*, the new 'Truffaut', has opened in France four years after François Truffaut's death. It was to have been his twenty-second feature. Instead it became Claude Miller's sixth. Truffaut refers to his projected *La Petite Voleuse* in his recently published *Correspondance* in two letters to Helen Scott, who worked at the French Film Office in New York, collaborated on Truffaut's *Hitchcock* and was one of his closest friends. In 1964 he refers to *La Petite Voleuse* as being 'in the style of Ingmar Bergman's *Monika*, a young delinquent's discovery of her femininity and coquettishness, a sort of female version of *Les 400 Coups*.' A year later he writes, 'I'm a bit upset today; I've seen my first mistress again, the first woman I ever lived with, in 1948, M... She doesn't look too good, just like me. She's been in prison, she's got three children, she's been a prostitute and done a bit of everything. She lives in Marseilles. I'm going to see her in October to tape an interview to use for the script of *La Petite Voleuse*.'

But in fact the genesis of the film predates even this correspondence. As Claude Miller says, 'François Truffaut had it in mind as far back as *Les 400 Coups*, which was intended to feature not only Antoine Doinel, but also, in tandem, the parallel story of a young delinquent girl. There are obvious links between the two characters but also two basic differences. First, unlike the situation in *Les 400 Coups*, Janine is virtually an orphan; her mother had "fooled around" with one of the German occupying soldiers and then abandoned the resultant child, who at the beginning of the film is being brought up by her uncle and aunt. The second difference concerns the ages—Antoine was 13-14 while Janine is 16-17 and with the means to achieve her economic independence.'

Though Truffaut abandoned the idea of a boy/girl partnership for *Les 400 Coups*, he never gave up the idea of one day making a film about Janine. He continued to add to his dossier of notes on the project, based on his usual mixture of autobiographical elements, press clippings, stories told by friends and especially his own real-life encounter mentioned above. In the year before his death in 1984 he asked his lifelong friend and co-scriptwriter, Claude de Givray, to resume work on the project. When Truffaut died, a forty-page treatment existed. As Claude Miller says, 'François would have made the film simply from those forty pages and he probably wouldn't have developed it further. He'd merely have written the dialogue the night before each day's shooting, as was his wont.'

After Truffaut's death the director and producer, Claude Berri, bought the rights to the film, thought it would appeal to Miller to direct and gave him the script to read. Miller was 'knocked out' by it from the outset. 'The script contained the overall framework, the characters and the structure, to which

TRUFFAUT'S MILLER

I remained very faithful. I invented nothing, apart from one character near the end whom I needed for dramatic reasons.' Miller insisted on showing his final script to Claude de Givray, Madeleine Morgenstern (Truffaut's widow) and their two daughters Laura and Ewa, saying he would go ahead only if they all agreed. The final version could easily be taken for a Truffaut film, so much so that Miller modestly credits himself merely as 'metteur en scène', forgoing the conventional 'A film by...' and also crediting Truffaut and de Givray as the scriptwriters.

'I never asked myself how Truffaut would have made it. That would have been both stultifying and futile.' Miller claims his position was just like that of any other director who reads a short story and says he would like to make it into a film. And yet the film is so permeated by the sensitivity and 'pudeur' associated with Truffaut that it is hard to believe it all happened by accident rather than design, even given the extent to which Miller is inevitably influenced, consciously or not, by his long association with Truffaut, first as an actor (in *L'Enfant Sauvage*) and then as production manager for all Truffaut's films from 1967 (*Baisers Volés*) to 1975 (*Adèle H.*). Before that he had been an assistant to Bresson, Godard and Demy.

Miller freely acknowledges that

Truffaut was very much his guru when he first turned to directing. But with such major successes under his belt as *Garde à Vue* and *L'Effrontée* he claims that Truffaut is now merely one of a dozen or so influences on his work. He does, however, emulate his mentor by seeking to establish the equivalent of his own team of actors and technicians, which all makes for the cosy and reassuring family atmosphere so beloved of Truffaut. Miller goes one better in even choosing to have his wife work alongside him both on the adaptation of the dialogue and on the continuity. 'I really like feeling part of a team. Ideally, I'd always like to use the same people, rather like Bergman.'

La Petite Voleuse is the story of an adolescent girl who can't wait to become a woman. In the process of discovering her womanhood she also discovers her independence. In her transitional phase, she combines childlike qualities of innocence, naiveté and spontaneity with knowingness and low cunning. Miller is fascinated by teenage passion. 'They never cheat emotionally. They go for everything wholeheartedly. I find their absolutism moving.'

The film is set in 1950 in an unidentified provincial town in the Deux Sèvres region reminiscent of the small town 'in the centre of France' used in *L'Argent de Poche*. Petty thieving is rife

La Petite Voleuse: Simon de la Brosse, Charlotte Gainsbourg.



R'S TALE

in Janine's all-girls school, as it was in Antoine's in *Les 400 Coups*. Suspicion centres, rightly, on Janine. She can't wait to escape from school and transform herself from ugly duckling to swan, changing in the toilets from her drab school shoes and ankle socks into stockings and high heels.

Charlotte Gainsbourg, daughter of Serge Gainsbourg and Jane Birkin, who plays the role of Janine, is already being billed in *Paris Match* as the new Isabelle Adjani. Her part here, following on from her success in *L'Effrontée*, should do much to establish her as one of France's most exciting young actresses. Miller is anxious not to overstate the obvious parallel between his relationship with her after only two films and Truffaut's with Jean-Pierre Léaud, which extended over many years and several films. But there is no doubt about his fascination with her in *La Petite Voleuse*.

Janine is caught in the act of stealing the contents of a church offertory box and put behind bars in an episode reminiscent of Antoine and the typewriter in *Les 400 Coups*, for which she receives a beating from her uncle as did Antoine from his stepfather. Anxious to lose her virginity quickly as a sign of adulthood, she proposes sleeping with a forty-year-old surveyor on whose shoulder she has accidentally fallen asleep in the

cinema. His name is Michel Davenne, the same surname as the character played by Truffaut in *La Chambre Verte*.

Michel's initial refusal—because 'love is a very important thing' and he doesn't want to be the first man in her life—leads to her seducing the plumber in the house of the young trendy (*bon chic, bon genre*) couple with whom she works as a maid. Michel resists no more and Miller films their love scenes as chastely and discreetly as Truffaut, at one point including another direct homage to the master in the shape of a kitten lapping milk from a breakfast tray outside the door of the hotel room where the couple have spent the night—shades of *La Peau Douce* and *La Nuit Américaine*. 'I'm no longer a girl. I'm an adult,' exults Janine. 'The most moving thing about adolescents is that everything they do is for the first time,' says Miller, echoing Truffaut.

Michel in his role as mentor to Janine (akin to Truffaut's relationship with Jean-Pierre Léaud and also to his role as the doctor in *L'Enfant Sauvage*) undertakes her literary education, enthusing over Victor Hugo, as did Antoine (and Truffaut) over Balzac. Janine enrolls on a typing course, which leads at one point to a crescendo of rapid cross-cuts between the pounding keys and the couple embracing reminis-

cent of the cross-cutting and musical crescendo in the cinema in *Antoine et Colette*.

Soon, however, the attractions of furtive, small-town adultery fade in comparison with the appeal of a young tearaway called Raoul, who introduces Janine to more ambitious thieving, motocross and romantic passion. He convinces her that the world of work is a joke and they take off on his motorbike with the spoils of her theft from her employers for a brief idyll on the Atlantic coast. One half expects the equivalent of the freeze-frame at the end of *Les 400 Coups*, when Antoine, after a similar flight to the sea, turns bleakly to face the camera. But here we get a spot of 'camping sauvage' in the dunes, punctuated with sea-bathing and love-making, before Raoul casually ends both the idyll and the lives of a herd of grazing cows by tossing an unexploded grenade in their midst.

Janine is arrested and incarcerated in a reformatory run by nuns, rather like the Centre for Juvenile Delinquency at Villejuif frequented both by Truffaut, in reality, and Antoine, in the parallel celluloid world of *Les 400 Coups*. Like Antoine, Janine finally escapes from the brutality of this regime. Unlike him, she returns home on the run to her uncle and aunt, who offer nought for her comfort. Her aunt, in an act of motiveless malignity—'*Je suis méchante*'—reveals that she had not let her know about her mother's letters. Janine is pregnant and consults a backstreet abortionist, who takes the camera Janine has received from her friend in the reformatory as a deposit. Taking refuge from the police in the local cinema, Janine happens to see on the newsreel that Raoul is embarking on a troopship for Indochina. She breaks into the shop run by the abortionist, collects her camera and boards a bus heading along the coast, having decided to have her baby. A postscript informs us that, 'Medical tests revealed that her baby would probably be extremely restless.'

A typical Truffaut-like open ending, then? Miller: 'The ending is open, though I gave Janine more hope than Truffaut (in his synopsis), by equipping her with a means of earning a living in the shape of a camera.' Visions of Janine escaping from a life of crime into the world of photography, just like Truffaut into the world of the cinema.

The parallels between the universe of Truffaut/Antoine and that of Miller/Janine are remarkable. After *Baisers Volés* Truffaut said he would never make another Antoine Doinel film and then went on to make *Domicile Conjugal* and *L'Amour en Fuite*. Miller, having made two films starring Charlotte Gainsbourg, now claims: 'I am not expecting to make a sequel.' A hint of scepticism might not perhaps be out of place.

Charlotte Gainsbourg



DON ALLEN

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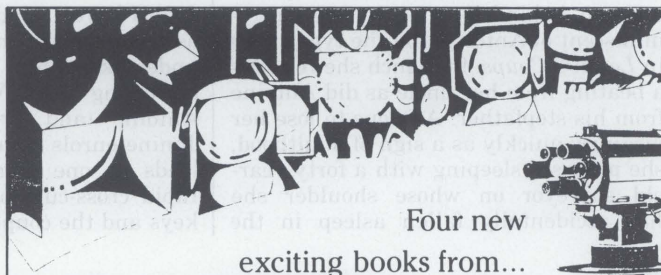
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Sur: 'Don't waste the rest of the night.'

THE COLD SOUTH SUR

Tangos, says Fernando Solanas, are stories that are sung, and the words and music of the tango form as much a part of *Sur* (Cannon) as they did of his previous film, *Tangos, l'Exil de Gardel*. While that was the sung story of an exile in France longing to return to his native Argentina, *Sur* is the story of a return in a different sense. Floreal Echegoyen is released from a five-year prison sentence at the end of the military dictatorship in 1983. Instead of going straight home, he hesitates, and wanders through the city during the long night, revisiting old friends, alive and dead, and old memories, pleasant and painful. Meanwhile his wife Rosi waits at home with their little boy Fideo, herself reviewing the turbulent history of their marriage and his five-year 'exile'.

The word *Sur*—south—carries a weighty burden of meanings for Solanas. At various times it is 'what comes later—what will happen' and, equally, it is 'The South', 'where life and desire are possible'. It is also Patagonia, to which several of the characters escape from the lethal oppression of the North. He makes of it a potent emblem for the touching sense of longing, of anticipation tinged with fear, of excitement spiked with dread, which is the film's mood no less than its subject. Floreal will return to his Rosi, just as his country will return to democracy, but their rediscovered joy will inevitably be hedged about with the knowledge or suspicion of betrayals and infidelities.

As in their personal lives, so with the body politic too: Solanas' portrait of his society is a vivid warning. At least, he says in an interview, the different strata of that society are talking to one another again. It is no longer a tyranny in which by speaking your mind you are liable to become an instant 'desaparecido'.

Inevitably, though, for all its guarded and admirable optimism, the mood of *Sur* is predominantly sombre. The film divides into four sections: The Table of Dreams, The Search, Love and Only Love, and Dying is Tiring. The first springs from talk at the café table and boldly mixes memory and desire, past and present, old and young, in a rhapsodic cocktail which you're forbidden to sip: it's down in one or not at all. The waiting Rosi hugs her tiny son to her breast in longing for her absent husband while, at the opposite end of life, the newly released Floreal meets up with a dead man, El Negro, nicknamed El Muerto, who shows him how he 'disappeared' by restaging his own death at the hands of a plain-clothes hit squad. Solanas can handle the set-pieces well. But just as effective are the quieter throwaways, as when the old tango singer swears he'll never forgive their accordionist for dying on them after thirty years.

The past is vividly present as a legacy to preserve. Floreal acknowledges the radical protest of an older generation (in well-staged black-and-white 'reconstructions') and it is its homage to

history which is often the most poignant aspect of an epic which can occasionally seem to be merely the love chronicle of a sullen and jealous 'reaparecido'. An old writer and intellectual, Emilio, barricades himself in the hall when 'they' come for him. His wife refuses to hide, bringing instead the last glass they will share as they toast their lives together and the future for which they are dying.

Solanas has found an intriguing way of accounting for the place his own French exile (from 1977-85) plays in his life. A Corsican émigré, Roberto, becomes the close friend of the Echegoyens and, to Rosi's and his own alarm, the lover of Rosi, towards the end of Floreal's sentence. The event confuses his decision to return to Corsica, and the image of split loyalties—the good friends, as well as lover, he has found in Argentina, the longing for his own land—further deepens and strengthens the film's major reflections on trust, friendship and those attachments which seem always to demand more than any one mere human effort can satisfy.

Guilt plays a large part in all their lives, all save that of the brutal militia, of course, for whom guilt is a moral refinement beyond their reach. Rosi is the most crushed by her affair with Roberto until Emilio tells her to disregard her guilt. For him desire is the springboard of life and in the moral balance outweighs all. Something of this episode, Solanas confesses, owes its origin to his own near-fatal illness, which attacked him as the film was about to go into production. *Sur* was not only about a return to freedom and Argentina, it was about a return to life which, in comparison to death, seemed to him to have the edge.

Humour is always close to the surface of *Sur*, thankfully. Surrounding the grim, embattled, occasionally self-indulgent presence of Floreal, the cheerful resilience of Emilio and Roberto and the others, and particularly the gallows humour of El Negro, the dead man, convince us that they will find a life worth living, even if they never reach the fabled 'South'. Dying is tiring, all right, El Negro tells Floreal, but it certainly puts things into perspective. Don't leave. Resist. Go home. Start again. You have a wife and child and a life ahead of you. Don't waste the rest of the night.

There is something of Floreal's own restless casting-about for a way ahead in the processes of Solanas' rambling nocturne. Though it has the baroque trappings of early Wajda, or the carnival romanticism of some Fellini, it sometimes lacks the formal discipline, the wit or the pictorial originality to match those masters. But it has its own compensations: its warmth, its bravura and, in the political context, its wholehearted life-and-death courage and honesty.

GAVIN MILLAR



Mississippi Burning: FBI men Gene Hackman and Willem Dafoe.

PARKER'S BRAND MISSISSIPPI BURNING

It is one of Hollywood's great embarrassments that its first great feature film, *The Birth of a Nation*, was a rabble-rousing, racist glorification of the Ku Klux Klan. Oddly enough, though, if Griffith's vision of a betrayed South inaugurated a tradition, it was not one of explicit racism but rather a nostalgic, rose-tinted view of the old Confederacy. For directors like John Ford, in such films as *Stagecoach*, *Rio Grande* and, especially, *The Sun Shines Bright*, the South became the repository of a lost chivalric ideal. It was a dubious tradition that reached its apotheosis in the decayed chic of *Gone With the Wind*.

Alan Parker has attracted a lot of criticism for his treatment of the Civil Rights struggle, so it is only fair to point out that there is no affection for the old South in *Mississippi Burning* (Rank). The satanic New Orleans villains of *Angel Heart* had a raffish attractiveness, but no one could say that of the rednecked bigots and lynchers in his new film. Parker is not a politician and he's entirely uninterested in ideas but he knows what he hates. The inhabitants of Parker's Neshoba County, Mississippi—like the Turkish prison warders of *Midnight Express*—display their depravity on the outside. He has insisted on the care he took selecting every extra himself and they are an ugly, fleshy collection, harshly captured through Parker's lens.

The actual cinematographer is Peter Biziou, but it's no insult to him to say that it is in visual terms that Alan Parker speaks most eloquently and personally (Biziou must have performed a similar function as the photographer of *A World Apart* for Chris Menges). In each of his films Parker becomes

obsessed with the intensity of his subject matter and loses interest in the details. In its jabbing righteous intensity, *Midnight Express* left behind the issues of the case it was dramatising. The visual excesses of *Angel Heart* grabbed you by the throat, which somewhat delayed any qualms about whether the plot actually fitted together, and whether that mattered.

Mississippi Burning begins with elegant simplicity. Two drinking fountains stand in an anonymous seedy room, one for whites, one for blacks. An ugly white boy comes and drinks from one, then a beautiful black boy drinks from the other. The scene changes to the inferno of a church in flames. The caption, 'Mississippi 1964', comes as a shock: this is more recent than we might have thought. We then see the crime which sets the film off, the murder of two white Civil Rights workers and a local black man who were driving through Mississippi trying to register black voters.

Parker has been criticised for putting two white FBI men, Anderson (Gene Hackman) and Ward (Willem Dafoe) at the centre of this crucial episode in the struggle for black political rights, but that is not entirely fair. The importance of this affair was that for the first time (under considerable pressure from the Attorney General, Robert Kennedy), J. Edgar Hoover sent his FBI agents into Mississippi in force and they solved the crime in six weeks.

Unfortunately they solved it in ignominious fashion by bribing two senior Klansmen to become informers. This was clearly too much for Alan Parker and his screenwriter Chris Gerolmo and as a result they have replaced the

actual details at the centre of this otherwise true historical episode with a police drama of a rather familiar kind. We last saw it in Dennis Hopper's *Colors* and it concerns the struggle between a fervent young officer who believes in playing it by the book and an experienced middle-aged cop who realises that you must compromise but also bend the rules when necessary.

Hackman plays an old FBI man who is himself a Southerner and whose father was a racist—'an old man so full of hate, he didn't know that being poor was what was killing him.' Hackman's performance is awesome in its lights and shades, its shifts from good-old-boy joviality to violence. Above all he embodies an understanding of the South's complexities while never going easy on its sins which goes far beyond the rather paltry conception of the character as written.

In fact the generous humanity of Hackman's performance may obscure the grim pessimism of Parker's message. Parker's version of the FBI investigation is even darker than the corrupt truth. The message that grim, grey-suited Willem Dafoe must learn is the same one that the imprisoned hero of *Midnight Express* was forced to learn: we can only defeat our enemies by behaving as badly as they do. As Anderson puts it to Ward in a climactic argument: 'These people crawled out of the sewers, Mr Ward, maybe the gutter is the place we have to be.' We don't just see the racist murderers caught; we see them terrorised and tortured just as they terrorised and tortured their own victims.

This is Parker's genuine distortion and it arises not so much from his failings as a political historian but as a cinematic storyteller. The blacks in the film are presented as numb, passive figures appearing on screen only to sing or to suffer. As a spokesman for law and order, Willem Dafoe is so pallid as to be almost a vacuum. Parker simply isn't very interested in the details of the FBI investigation, so we're not told, for example, how the identities of witnesses are being leaked to the KKK. (I began to suspect that Dafoe was a double agent.) And Parker seems indifferent about details—after a suspenseful lynching scene, it's not even clear whether the victim has been killed or not. In this context it's clear that thuggish unofficial retribution is the only answer, but it indicates Parker's limitations as a commentator on the Civil Rights movement.

Parker has attacked this subject with an almost visionary intensity. He's preoccupied with destruction: not just fire but with the decay of the American South, the eroded buildings, the tormented faces of the blacks. The scene where a line of grey-suited FBI men have to wade through a swamp has a real physical kick. Parker is good on the

dark corners of life and this image really shows us something of a country whose different parts still don't fit together.

The problem comes when he shackles his idiosyncratic Gothic imagination to an argument about the details of FBI procedure (or Turkish penal policy, for that matter). Parker has loudly claimed the right to fictionalise his subject matter, but he must not then use these fictions as evidence with which to hector us on the realities of law enforcement.

SEAN FRENCH

THE ART OF WAR WAR REQUIEM

When Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem* received its first performance in 1960, the response of the critics was couched in terms of respectful awe which had little to do with the complex and ambiguous character of the work itself. As an exalted expression of generalised grief and anguish over suffering, it was hailed as the musical equivalent of one of those discreetly modernist war memorials at which political leaders lay wreaths, their features suitably solemn for the photo opportunity. More cynical voices identified in the *Requiem* its creator's successful bid to join the ranks of the Great and Good and achieve the ultimate beatification of a peerage. Choral societies enthusiastically took the piece on board as a nutritious alternative to 'Messiah' and 'Elijah', Britten himself was no longer tagged with such invidious labels as 'difficult' or 'modern', and the Chairman of Decca Records, bucked by the sales, is rumoured to have asked whether he could trot out something similar for next year.

The implicit pacifist message in the *Requiem* might not be to all tastes but could hardly be ignored. Interleaved with the Latin liturgical texts are poems by Wilfred Owen, whose stress on 'the pity war distils' is emphatically not designed for bemedalled processions to the Cenotaph. The issue, significant or otherwise, of the poet's homosexuality could not be openly discussed while his brother Harold remained alive to launder his reputation, but this too must have inspired an empathy in the composer.

A film treatment of the work which both reflected its ideological consistency and effectively captured the music's more ironic accents might seem an impossibility, yet this is what Derek Jarman has contrived in *War Requiem* (Anglo-International), matching with his own visual language the economy of means intrinsic to Britten's art as well as its impressive absence of rhetoric.

The shoestring budget of the Jarman movie, of which interviews regularly make much, has seldom been used to

more potent effect. Within a former psychiatric hospital damaged in the great storm of 1987, a landscape of the imagination has been created whose halls, courtyards, lawns and corridors become by turns the fields of Flanders, a ward full of wounded, a theatre, a mausoleum and the labyrinths of Hell. The cast is reduced to a group of representative 'soloists' led by Laurence Olivier as a bearded veteran in a wheelchair abstractedly clutching at his campaign medals. Two younger soldiers are starkly contrasted: Nathaniel Parker is the diffidently questing figure of the poet himself and Owen Teale plays an ardent, shining-eyed volunteer whose death and resurrection offer one of the film's more obviously painterly images.

This sense of the painter's eye constantly alert to colour and texture is related, as in all Jarman's work, to a self-conscious theatricality strongly linked to the circus, pantomime and music-hall traditions of the past. Owen's 'Strange Meeting', intoned by Olivier at the opening of the film, is later enacted as a kind of Elizabethan dumbshow, in a ruined, snow-sprinkled courtyard where German Fritz, bayonet at the ready, surprises British Tommy soundlessly strumming an upright piano. Elsewhere the Victorian *pose plastique* style is brought memorably into play to create a haunting vision of soldiers grouped in mournful repose beside a shallow pool, their stillness only now and then disturbed by the slightest facial and gestural hints of mutual tenderness.

The element of decor in such moments is mirrored by the use of

documentary footage from the period, whose images—the dust and gleam of galloping horses, a Mondrianesque abstract of a platoon advancing across a snowy field—have a more than accidental beauty. Lest we should be altogether seduced, Jarman throws against them an anthology of lacerating modern horrors, flyblown corpses, the dying festooned with their own organs, executioners massing for the kill, heightening rather than adorning the resistless energy of Britten's score.

For all its qualities of spareness and restraint, *War Requiem* is emphatically Jarmanesque in its idiosyncrasies. Those who fretted and twitched in *The Last of England* at the visual obsession with Tilda Swinton are fated to do so again. Jarman's camera loves her just as much as John Huston told us that his camera loved Marilyn Monroe. Her numinous presence as a nurse, winding bandages, cradling the dying, is given even greater significance in the *Sanctus* sequence, essentially a celebration of Swinton as the loosely clad studio model of some seventeenth-century Italian artist (a souvenir, as it were, of *Caravaggio*) curling and braiding the tresses of her hair to an improvisatory jangle of bells.

Such maddening repetitiveness is as typical of Jarman as the intrinsic handsomeness of the scene itself. So too is the 'Abraham and Isaac' episode, in which the patriarch preparing to set upon his defenceless son is watched, like a doctor at an anatomy lesson, by an audience of leering, cigar-chewing profiteers, their faces blobbed and smeared with caricature make-up.

War Requiem: The alert painter's eye



Heavy-handed in its satirical blatancy, the sequence is intrusive to the design of the film, unlike a subsequent depiction of Piero della Francesca's 'Christ Rising from the Dead', where a transcendent innocence purges the assembled images of potential kitsch.

Innocence, salving and regenerative, lies at the core of Jarman's work. He is the most English of movie-makers, an authentic patriot in his lyrical rage at the betrayal of the best by the worst, and nearly all his films can be read, on one level at least, as statements on the profoundly difficult business of being English in an age of dislocation. He has never been reluctant to let us watch him learning his art, and *War Requiem*, with its firm imposition of formal structures and disciplines, is among the best things he has ever done.

JONATHAN KEATES

MOTHER ENGLAND PARIS BY NIGHT

Clara Paige is a Tory politician remorselessly on the up-and-up. She cares with mesmerising intensity. She has a husband who has learnt to keep quiet, older than her, a paralytic drunk. Her schedule includes only a minute or two a day for the care of their small son, who is as a result both neglected and spoiled. Although powerless to resist Clara's manipulative demands, her sister—read daughter?—can at least resist her condescending flattery: 'You have my vote. . .'. If ten years of 'Thatcherism' has taught us one lesson it is to come to the point; and David Hare, after the puzzling *Wetherby*, has in his new film done just that.

Paris by Night (Virgin)—its working title was the unappetising *Butter*

Mountain—is a fully decked-out thriller: it begins with a man in a belted raincoat lurking under a Southall streetlamp and proceeds, through the report of an anonymous phone call, attempted blackmail, an unpremeditated drowning in the Seine and an illicit, supercharged sexual encounter in a Paris hotel, to a climax in which the drunken husband takes a pistol from his own head and turns it on his adulterous wife. Like a good pulp novel, it was written, Hare reveals in the introduction to the Faber screenplay, in a brisk six weeks. Making the film was one of the happiest periods of his life: a reward, perhaps, for coming to the point.

The tone is marked by a certain jabbing insistence. At a civic meeting, for example, at which she presents five grateful Sikhs with community awards, Mrs Paige, the local Euro MP, radiates concern, draws her chair closer to the semicircle of bearded faces, prepares to give all her attention—and then breaks off to warn a mother that her baby is slipping off her lap. There is an intrinsic implausibility about an Indian baby falling to the floor because its mother is attending to the performance of a white middle-class politician. Nevertheless, the moment has a charge and makes its point, before passing swiftly on, with fashionable, unanswerable confidence: here is 'Mother England' in all her glory.

The plot is shaded in with political observations: buckshot from a left-wing writer into the flank of the Tory elephant. Clara is being blackmailed by the Paiges' former partner, the lank man in the raincoat, who took the rap when their asset-stripped business went messily to the wall. She is despatched to Paris by the Foreign Secretary to stone-wall in an agricultural wrangle: her

predecessor has broken his neck in a riding accident and is not up to haggling with the French which, she's informed, involves a great deal of head-shaking.

Wallace, the young man with whom Clara has a chance affair in Paris, is a footloose English designer who has just sold 2,000 bedside lamps produced in Rennes to a string of French motels. She helped him secure his start-up grant, and he recognises her in a lobby. He seems her exact opposite, but is he really? He is after all well-positioned to become one of the tycoons of 1992; and after an attack of conscience, when he discovers her crime, is quite prepared to turn a blind eye. And there is, too, a peppering of the sort of social observation at which Hare excels: the diplomatic functionary, for instance, who rescues Clara from a financial fix in Paris with the emergency American Express card and then reveals, with all the self-satisfaction of someone living in a seemingly impenetrable laager, that he is president of the Embassy ADS and has the best part in *Sailor Beware* ('The French just love it').

The point, however, is not the lecture, but the mystery, and at the heart of the mystery is the powerful and powerfully alluring figure of Clara Paige, the sort of rangy, bad woman whom in another age Barbara Stanwyck might have been drawn to play. David Hare has been singularly fortunate with his actresses, from the powerful Kate Nelligan to the even more powerful Vanessa Redgrave; and here Charlotte Rampling gives a stylish, strikingly uncaricatured performance, which becomes truly remarkable when, at the end, she manages to stoke our sympathy for this coolly amoral murderess, who as easily tips her blackmailer off the Pont des Arts as she breaks her conversational rhythm to save a baby from falling to the floor.

The plot coasts along with tidy professionalism and an absence of loose ends. Michael Gambon plays Clara's husband with that world-weary resignation he has made his own; he is first seen sprawled on the floor as if dead, and has to be hauled by his heels into the bathroom. Jane Asher is the sister, the cheese to Rampling's chalk; and in support are a roster of Tory party, civil servant and diplomatic corps faces—at the moment, it seems, we have a great many actors capable of wearing well-cut suits and exuding a combination of condescension and menace, just as once we had a battalion of players who could wear service uniforms with unforced conviction. The film gleams in the best burnished contemporary British manner: camera Roger Pratt, designer Anthony Pratt; and it is to Hare's considerable credit that he can insert a tribute to Bresson—a gliding riverboat lit-up like a fairy grotto—which actually enhances his own compelling story.

JOHN PYM

Paris by Night: Charlotte Rampling, the vengeful Mrs Paige.



IVAN THE TERRIBLE

WOMEN ON THE VERGE OF A NERVOUS BREAKDOWN

Pepa, the heroine of *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (Rank), is a beautiful, intelligent, resourceful, witty and professionally successful woman. This does not prevent Ivan, the man she has lived with for some years, leaving her for another less beautiful, less witty but nevertheless intelligent and successful woman. Pepa, not unnaturally, feels miserable, the more so as she has just discovered she's pregnant, but all her attempts to get a phone call through to Ivan fail, with the result that she stakes out his flat and begins to discover things about him she would rather not have known.

For a start, his former wife has only just emerged from the asylum into which she retreated after Ivan left her. She is a wreck, infantilised either by the trauma or the treatment of it, living entirely in the past and still sporting the bouffant hairdo and short skirts fashionable a quarter of a century ago, unable to think of anything except revenge against her former husband and unhinged enough to shoot if she can only track him down. Not a pretty sight.

Then there is the fact that Ivan has a son, Carlos. Pepa knew nothing about this but discovers when a charming young man turns up to look at the flat she has put up for rent and recognises Pepa's photos of his father. Carlos has a grudge against Ivan too, partly on his own account and partly for how he treated his mother. After which there is the feminist lawyer whom Pepa consults in order to assist her friend Candela compromised with the police on account of a brief affair with a Shi'ite terrorist, only to discover that the lawyer is in fact the other woman with whom Ivan is preparing to depart on holiday. So who is Ivan that all these women revolve around him? Unfathomable, intangible, inaccessible and also rather unattractive, elderly and feeble. Why do they find him so seductive?

Despite the grim underlying theme, Pedro Almodovar's latest film is an agreeable comedy which aims at the zany and occasionally achieves it. Clearly, it would have been funnier had it starred Walter Matthau and been directed by Billy Wilder, but Almodovar makes a good stab at the genre and adds an interesting quirk by casting a woman in the Matthau role, thereby rendering it instantly warmer and more sympathetic. True to type, the centrepiece of the film is Pepa's flat and the comings and goings which have just enough logic to be farcical and sufficient exoticism to keep us on our toes with surprises. There are a series of running gags, the best of which concerns some gazpacho spiked with barbiturates which Pepa originally prepared for Ivan's return but which conveniently



Women on the verge.

knocks out a couple of troublesome policemen who have come to interrogate Candela. A similar gag involves a switched-on cab driver with dyed blonde hair and earring who always turns up when he's needed and is always game to 'follow that cab' just like in the movies.

But zany comedy is not Almodovar's only source. The credit sequence with its montage of fashion photos is reminiscent of 60s Godard, with its unpleasant dismemberment of the female body into, as it were, the component parts, while the narrative structure, apart from the central episode in Pepa's apartment, more resembles the French new-new-wave, Beineix or, perhaps, Ioseliani. Those who accuse this filmmaker of modishness have a point, and his slightly desperate eclecticism is only—but extremely well—redeemed by the force of Carmen Maura's performance as Pepa.

However, all this is so much froth. It would not be true to say that *Women on the Verge* has a serious 'message' since it is a work designed, above all, to indulge its maker's sensibilities, but it is a film which interestingly belies the director's statements about it and in so doing gives some pause for thought. According to Almodovar, women are interesting when deserted because they 'know how to suffer' and in this they are superior to men. Yet what is striking is both that these splendid women should be making a huge fuss about a poor stick if ever there was one and that they are not suffering very much but in fact are

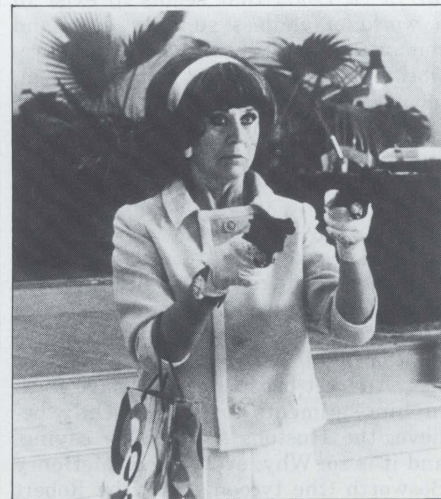
quite singleminded and clear-headed about their desire and capacity for revenge. Ivan's ex-wife will shoot him given half a chance; Pepa refuses to talk to him when she finally catches up with him, thereby denying Ivan the possibility of assuaging his guilt.

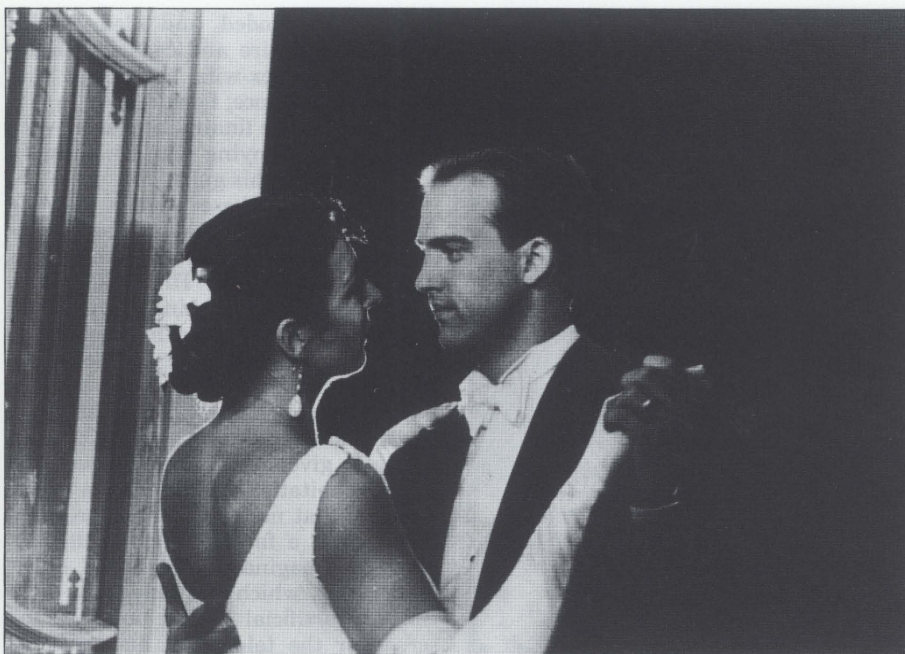
So far from these women needing Ivan, which is the gloss Almodovar puts on his film, Ivan needs them. He is literally unattainable. His job—he is an actor employed in dubbing films—is impersonation. Most often he is no more than a disembodied voice, on the soundtrack, on the telephone, on the answering machine. The result is that Pepa, Lucia and Marisa are all employed in trying to give this nonentity an entity, a local habitation and, indeed, a name. The fact that none of them is prepared to let go is a fantasy of total dependence, an imaginary reversal of Ivan's inadequacy, which can only take place through artificial media such as the screen or the telephone, but never in reality. *Women on the Verge* has much in common with Frederic Raphael's stunningly misogynist play *Richard's Things*, which similarly presented itself as a sympathetic portrayal of women and ended up a hideous exposure of Raphael.

On the one hand, therefore, *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* is a cleverly choreographed, slick and nicely observed comedy of manners with enough slapstick to keep most viewers smiling, and several fine performances. On the other hand, it has a profoundly reactionary side which is felt in the ambiguities of the authorial position, the unease experienced when the totally sympathetic heroine is maltreated by her creator by being placed in a false position. It would also be interesting to know what happened to Pepa's pregnancy. Was it left over from an earlier, more realist version, or was the prospect of finally pinning the terrible Ivan down more than Almodovar could contemplate? Will the real Pedro Almodovar please stand up?

JILL FORBES

Julietta Serrano, the jilted wife.





Mr North: Anjelica Huston and Anthony Edwards.

ANYTHING BUT STATIC MR NORTH

Mr North (Columbia Tri-Star) is the final, unexpected grace note in a career one had thought well finished with *The Dead*. John Huston did not direct *Mr North*; nor, in the end, did illness allow him, as he planned, to play the crusty old tycoon of Thornton Wilder's novel, from which the story is taken. But Huston's imprint is everywhere upon it. He co-wrote the script and acted as executive producer, leaving son Danny actually to call the shots and daughter Anjelica to glide through the film like some ethereal being—angelic indeed. It's as if the qualities that, at his best, made Huston great had been magically bequeathed to all his heirs (and let's not forget the near flawless script Huston's other son Tony carved out of *Dubliners* for *The Dead*).

Magical is the operative word; for *Mr North*, set in Newport, Rhode Island, in 1926, is one of those films like *Meet Me in St Louis* that seems to exist in a world of endless summer days and romantic, starlit evenings, when fireworks greet the 4th of July. Magical, too, because the very theme of the film—and here the old Huston agnosticism creeps in—is that enchantment is of our making. Theophilus North, talentless as a tutor, has one remarkable capacity—the ability to release formidable charges of static electricity at a touch of the fingertips. It literally dispels migraines in a flash and earns him a reputation as a healer that bears no relation to his actual, minimal capabilities. And yet because people have faith in him, ailments are cured. Only believe, the Hustons seem to be saying, and it is so. Why, even James McHenry Bosworth (the tycoon played by Robert

Mitchum in John Huston's stead) finds his weak bladder cured by Mr North's secret pills, which in the end turn out to be pure peppermint lozenges.

And who is to say that North is a charlatan? Certainly not mercenary Dr Angus McPherson (David Warner), whose nose is put royally out of joint when a touch of North's hands causes the brain tumour he has diagnosed in one of his patients to vanish. Professional pride is reduced to rubble, leaving McPherson to whine, 'We can't have a situation where people go round curing each other without us.'

Danny Huston films this delicate romantic comedy as if it is thistle-down. There's a lightness of touch and a deftness in the use of the moving camera uncommon in a man of his 26 years. He also adopts the technique, familiar from Alan Rudolph's *The Moderns* (set at about the same time in Paris), of opening sequences with a fade-in from black-and-white to colour. In both films this has the effect of distancing the action, introducing an element of self-reflection, reminding us that an organising hand is at work and that we should not necessarily believe the evidence of our eyes.

Nothing in *Mr North* is what, at first, it appears. Does Mr North resemble a wimp with the feeblest French accent in Christendom? In fact he is a jujitsu champion with the meanest line in bodily disablement since *Sugata Sanshiro*. He is a chameleon, who adapts to the surroundings in which he finds himself, but so are those with whom he comes in contact. Among other things, the film is a little essay in ersatz accents—from Mr North's fractured French to the even

wackier tones of Harry Dean Stanton's Henry Simmons, a Cockney of the Wabash Avenue, Chicago variety who, thanks to a trip to London, has 'picked up the limey talk'. What comes out, of course, is based on the seemingly ineradicable transatlantic conviction that everybody in Britain is born within the sound of Bow bells. There are other eccentric accents, too. Like Tammy Grimes' Mrs Baily-Lewis, the *grande dame* of Newport 1926. What, exactly, is she speaking? Is it Irish? Scottish? Or just plain Hollywood-on-Sea?

Huston (John? Danny?) homes in on the social pretensions that underpinned Newport society in those carefree inter-war years. It's a milieu where unannounced visitors, looking less than *comme il faut*, are directed to the backdoor by self-important flunkies. Yet cutting across this band of pseuds and sycophants is Lauren Bacall as Mrs Amelia Cranston, a one-time skivvy who has risen in the world and now runs a boarding house for those servants who are as poor as she once was. This is a shrewd piece of casting, evoking memories of all those sophisticated but socially indeterminate characters she played in the late 1940s, often opposite Humphrey Bogart.

There's an earthy honesty and integrity in Bacall's screen persona that in *Mr North* is used as the perfect counterpoint to the prevailing atmosphere of snobbery and artificiality. Bacall is one half of a pincer movement on Newport society c. 1926. The other half is Anjelica Huston's merry widow, Persis Bosworth-Tennyson. In life, the Hustons, in effect, are saying, you can be realist or romantic—but never stoop to be rapacious.

The two finest scenes in the film rest on values that transcend materialist Newport. Mistaken for a miracle worker, Theophilus North visits an old lady who is clearly on her deathbed. He reminds her of her favourite hymn and the scene ends with a kind of spiritual affirmation that is magic in itself. The ineffable, Huston seems to be saying, is what you want it to be and what you make of it. The closing scene is a direct illustration of this. It's a ballroom sequence in which, some enchanted evening, Mr North really does catch sight of a loved one across a crowded room and waltzes her off into the future—not to the strains of Rodgers and Hammerstein, but to Cole Porter's 'You Do Something to Me'.

Magic, in John, Danny and Anjelica Huston's world in the end wears a human face. As she picks up the static tingle while dancing with Anthony Edwards' admirable Mr North, Anjelica ventures, 'You're a most unusual man.' At which, as if on cue, the heavens send a lightning flash of approval. Goodness, as Mae West never said, has everything to do with it.

ALAN STANBROOK

HORIZONS WEST

THE BFI COMPANION TO THE WESTERN

edited by Edward Buscombe
André Deutsch/BFI Publishing/
£19.95

When Cole Younger was paroled from federal prison, he got a job selling tombstones. Ever since 1893, when Frederick Jackson Turner first described 'the Significance of the Frontier in American History' in response to its official closing by the Bureau of the Census, people have been trying to bury the Western. In 1902, Frank Norris mourned the death of the literary cowboy: 'No literature has sprung up around him, and the American epic... will never be written,' he wrote, a couple of months before Owen Wister's *The Virginian* was published.

In 1913 Thomas Ince predicted that the public had surfeited on movie Westerns—to William S. Hart, just about to make his first movie. In April 1929 *Photoplay* magazine commemorated the death of Wyatt Earp with an editorial suggesting that the aviator had replaced the cowboy as national hero, and that the Western was finished. So when Richard Schickel begins his foreword to *The BFI Companion to the Western* by describing it as 'the end of a long and lovely trail', we are on familiar territory; 'the West' has always been 'yesteryear', less a landscape than an era which has just ended.

In his introduction, Edward Buscombe emphasises how central to classical Hollywood's production line the Western was. From about 1910 to 1967, Westerns made up about a quarter of its feature films, 'the major genre of the world's major national cinema,' as Buscombe calls it. The introduction combines an account of the genre's development from film to film with a broader economic and institutional history. The most valuable part of this diverse and in some ways unfocused book, its section on Culture and History, places the thematic and ideological concerns of Hollywood's Westerns within a wider American mythology.

Given that the Western is so commonly identified as the genre in which the American cinema addresses American history, it is curious that so little criticism of it has taken account of the generic history of its earlier formal variants—usually not much more than a passing paragraph on James Fenimore Cooper or the dime novel. There are books aplenty that explain how 'it wasn't like that', and decry the movies' distortion of historical

fact, but as Edward Countryman points out in one of his excellent essays on the historical context, the history of Western agriculture 'is as unimportant to the filmic West as the exploits of Billy the Kid are to most serious historians.'

He also notes that 'little of the recent historical writing has had any impact on the Western'—or, he might have added, on its criticism. What is even more frequently missing from that criticism are references to the internal history of the evolution of Western mythology. As a result, much of it has, like editor Maxwell Scott in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, let the legend become fact, and printed the legend.

The history of the Western—the history of the dominant myth of American conquest, settlement, occupation and heroism—cannot be told simply by the facts. The fictional account of the gunfight at the OK Corral, for instance, existed as a piece of public cultural property before the historically accurate version of those events was written. The formulation of the myth of the frontier preceded the events which would provide its content, and the ideological framework provided by the myth governed the choice of material for Western history. Without a sophisticated understanding of the interaction between fact and legend in the construction of myth as history, the Western remains prey to random critical fancy—'Goldwater Westerns' and other such nonsense.

This book's principal achievement is that, in bringing together the perceptions of cultural historians such as Richard Slotkin and critics as sensitive to textual nuance as Martin Pumphrey, it suggests the basis for a much richer and more informed account of what the Western is and does. Pumphrey's skilful analysis of *The Searchers* and *Shane* ought to offer convincing evidence to the non-believer of the practical critical value to be gained from employing the tools of psychologically and culturally based criticism—even if you can hear Wyatt Earp and John Ford rolling in their graves: 'Marxist history and fetishism of the male body—in Tombstone!'

The longer essays turn the book into something critically more substantial than a work of reference. As it acknowledges several times, the *Companion* builds on the cataloguing work in Phil Hardy's *Encyclopedia of the Western*: its one substantial new contribution in this area is the only field in which it claims completeness, its coverage of every Western TV series and made-for-television Western.

Apart from any other consideration, any encyclopedia ought to be a mine of curious facts. From *The BFI Companion* we may learn that women comprised 8 per cent of the white population of California in 1850, that the Pony Express service actually only operated for eighteen months, and was a financial failure, and that Pancho Villa signed a \$25,000 contract with the Mutual Film Corporation giving them exclusive coverage of his battles, which he agreed to fight—as far as possible—in daylight.

In these enterprising times, it is useful to know that John Wayne had a good business sense about cattle: at \$19 a head, his profits in *Red River* were well above average for the Abilene market in the 1870s. Not many people know that Goethe planned to write a novel about the West in 1827, that Joseph Calleia and Dick Foran both began their careers as opera singers, or that Clint Walker was a Las Vegas deputy sheriff, John Dierkes an economist, Fred Thomson an ordained minister and Wallace Beery a female impersonator. I shall, however, most treasure the information that Wild Bill Hickok married a Mrs Thatcher

in 1876. Five months later, he was dead.

An auteurist approach dominates the film reviews. Of the 300 entries on individual films, 142 mention the director's name in their first sentence, and throughout this section, there is a heavy deployment of evaluative adjectives: 'magnificent', 'poetic', 'unjustly neglected'. The inclusions and exclusions in this section—*Antonio das Mortes* but not *The Alamo*—are, of course, contentiously opinionated, as are the commentaries. That is their function, and the book would be less fun if they weren't. I particularly relished Julian Petley's auteurist enthusiasms for figures beyond even the excesses of 50s *Cahiers* or Sarris: André de Toth's 'fascinating but underrated career', *The Last Wagon* described as 'typically Davesian', or his oddly placed claim that *The Vikings* was Richard Fleischer's 'masterpiece'.

Elsewhere, the book can't decide whether *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* is a Western (Jack Lodge suggests it provided Barton MacLane's finest Western part) or not (in his entry on John Huston, Peter Stanfield calls it marginal to the genre). But consistency is not what one looks for in such a book. Indeed,

CINEMA & SOCIETY

THE CINEMA OF APARTHEID

Keyan Tomaselli, University of Natal

'Reveals the potential... for a film industry in a new, free South Africa to come. A fascinating and invaluable book for anyone interested in film, anywhere.' Nadine Gordimer
March 1989: 320pp: 216x138
Pb: 0-415-02628-8: £9.95

THE HIDDEN CINEMA

British Film Censorship in Action 1913-1972

James Robertson

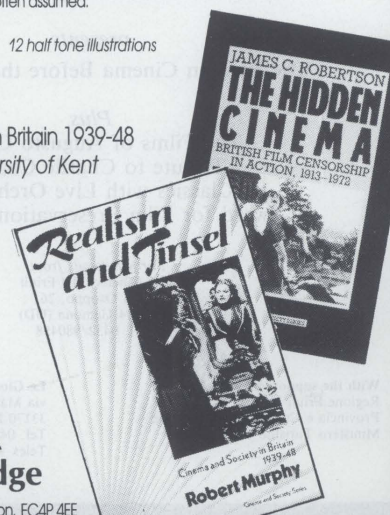
How does film censorship work in Britain? Robertson looks at the censorship histories of feature films from the silent era to the early 70s and shows that censorship has had a greater influence on film history than is often assumed.
Cinema and Society
April 1989: 208pp: 234x156: 12 half tone illustrations
Hb: 0-415-03291-1: £30.00

REALISM AND TINSEL

Cinema and Society in Britain 1939-48

Robert Murphy, University of Kent

Excavates a rich but neglected tradition of melodrama, gangster films, morbid thrillers, and costume pictures.
Cinema and Society
April 1989: 288pp:
234x156: Illustrated
Hb: 0-415-02982-1: £30.00



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it would be as disappointing to find it as to find nothing that one wanted to argue with. Much of the life of the Western—particularly given current levels of production—lies in the constant reassessment brought to it by re-viewings and new critical approaches. The considerable achievement of *The BFI Companion to the Western* is to widen the horizons of those approaches by some distance.

RICHARD MALTBY

TAKING RISKS

COPPOLA

by Peter Cowie
André Deutsch/£15

When Jean-Luc Godard suggested that some of the massive profits from Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* should be donated to support 'collective film-making on the class-struggle', he pinpointed one of the central paradoxes of the American director's career. Coppola has often had an antagonistic relationship with the Hollywood establishment: when he was first asked to direct *The Godfather*, he replied, 'I don't want to do it. I want to do art films.' Coppola's desire to pursue

an alternative path of film-making has led to extravagant bids for independence; the establishment of Zoetrope Studios allowed him to fulfil a number of personal ambitions, including funding projects by his favourite European directors, Wim Wenders (*Hammett*) and Godard himself (the never-produced *The Story*). And yet, despite Coppola's contempt for Hollywood movie-making, he made one of the biggest-grossing studio hits of all time (*The Godfather*), as well as a number of unremarkable mainstream films (*Finian's Rainbow*, *The Cotton Club*, *Peggy Sue Got Married*).

The glaring differences between Coppola's films, ranging from the low-key avant-garde thriller *The Conversation* to the operatic *Apocalypse Now*, and on to the lush melodrama *One From the Heart*, make it difficult to see them all as a single body of work. Peter Cowie, who is at his best in vivid descriptive passages about the films, reveals a number of thematic continuities, in particular a concern for relations between men in the family (*The Godfather I and II*, *Rumble Fish*). Cowie also emphasises the personal nature of some films, for example, the way in which

the elegiac tone of *Gardens of Stone* can be attributed to the death of Coppola's eldest son Gio midway through production. However, there is another important sense in which Coppola's films are intertwined with his life.

Coppola's work as an auteur makes more sense as a series of scenes from the class struggle in Hollywood than simply as an expression of artistic vision. The box-office success of *The Godfather* allowed him to re-establish Zoetrope, which had collapsed after the production of George Lucas' *THX 1138*, due to the withdrawal of Warner Brothers' backing. The new Zoetrope was an industrial utopia set in San Francisco, where Coppola attempted to establish a community of film-makers working in alternative ways to the dominant Los Angeles model. Coppola's dream was brought down by the box-office failure of the \$27 million *One From the Heart*. Outstanding debts forced him to take on a number of undistinguished projects in the early 1980s, until he could stage a return to more personal film-making with *Tucker*.

The fact that the stories behind the making of his films tend to be as dramatic as the films themselves reinforces the impression that Coppola's on-screen work, more than most other film-makers', must be seen in the light of his off-screen struggles. Coppola spent much of his time on *The Godfather* worrying that Paramount would replace him with Elia Kazan, who was deemed to be the only director who could work with Marlon Brando. The shooting of *Apocalypse Now* stands alongside *Heaven's Gate* as a mythic tale of contemporary film-making. Even the establishment of Zoetrope can be seen as a theatrical gesture dramatising Coppola's ambivalent relationship with Hollywood.

Coppola's philosophy of film-making is based on a desire for it to be a collective experience similar to theatrical production: 'I always missed in film the sense of sitting around with your friends at the café and the pretty girls and that kind of theatre life.' On a number of occasions, he has just gone away with a group of people to make a movie: *The Rain People* was shot on the road using mobile equipment, paralleling the later production of *The Outsiders* and *Rumble Fish* on location in Tulsa. Zoetrope itself was an attempt to create an artisanal, collective approach to film-making.

Alongside his version of community, Coppola has faith in the progressive possibilities of technology. On location in the

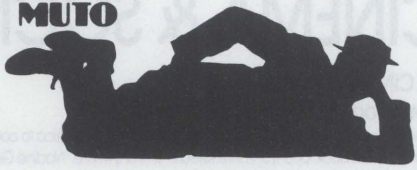
Philippines for the shooting of *Apocalypse Now*, he used to discuss ideas with the designer Dean Tavoularis about how to 'make a better telephone, develop a more efficient toaster, improve the style of baseball uniforms, build a beautiful little restaurant, [or] run a revolutionary design school such as Germany's prewar Bauhaus.' He was led into cinema by a childish fascination with its technical possibilities, and his career is littered with examples of its continuing hold over him. The theme of *The Conversation* is the manipulation of recorded sound, while *Apocalypse Now* is a pyrotechnic display of special effects as much as an exploration of the heart of darkness. However, Coppola's optimistic view of technology leads him to pessimistic conclusions about the cinema.

'There will not be film in 15 years except for industrial and biochemical or analysis reasons... Film is already like the horseless carriage; it's not relevant. The thing about film is that it is so beautiful, and it's in the apogee of its development, that one can't say that there should be no film. But I'm saying, aside from that, that film is dead, it's finished. Because the new medium is so incredibly flexible and immediate and economical, and can be as beautiful.'

Coppola's clear-sightedness about the decline of film and willingness to exploit the possibilities offered by video, along with his attempt to develop new production methods, contain unexpected echoes of Godard's enthusiastic abandonment of the cinema in the 1970s. In a strange sense, Coppola can be seen as an American Godard, linking technological optimism with a rejection of institutional forms of film-making. The similarities do not stop there, however, since Coppola has often expressed his admiration for European avant-garde cinema, and both *The Conversation* and *Rumble Fish* exhibit debts to this tradition.

Of course, Godard's was a political rejection of a dominant film-making style, while Coppola's was motivated by a distaste for the triumph of the businessman in Hollywood. In this sense, Coppola bears more comparison with a figure from American film-making whom Cowie frequently invokes—Orson Welles. Coppola admits that, 'just as Welles proceeded forward while neglecting his Hollywood base, his base of support, so in a familiar way I did that by leaving Hollywood in my time of triumph with the *Godfather* films. Instead of really insinuating myself with the

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BOOK REVIEWS

giants of Hollywood, I let their feelings for me slip, just as Welles did.'

Ironically, it is Coppola's failure to protect himself sufficiently from the financial power of the Hollywood establishment which has kept him making movies through the 1980s. He has not demonstrated the entrepreneurial flair which has granted true independence to his film-making contemporaries, like George Lucas with his empire of Industrial Light and Magic. As Coppola admits, 'I know that the amounts of money I deal in seem unreal to most people—they do to me as well; but please always remember that I work in these amounts because I am willing to risk everything for my work.' One suspects that his perfectionist attachment to high-budget, technologically dazzling productions will keep him working for some time in the industry for which he sees no future.

ADAM BARKER

RADICAL THEORY

THE CRISIS OF POLITICAL MODERNISM Criticism and Ideology in Contemporary Film Theory

by D. N. Rodowick

University of Illinois Press/
\$29.95

When American film theorists took up the relay from their flagging British counterparts a decade ago, they also acquired their UK colleagues' 'unrepentant Parisianism'. Since its creation by the editors of *Screen* in the 1970s, English-language film theory has bristled with imprecisely coined neologisms from the French that have made it difficult for anyone *sans* higher degree from the Ecole Normale to fathom.

This first monograph by one of America's leading young film scholars, *The Crisis of Political Modernism*, will garner few converts for film theory—in the author's own words, the book could stop a bullet at ten feet. But D. N. Rodowick, associate professor in comparative literature and director of film studies at Yale University, has succeeded in putting together the first thorough critical review of radical film theory since 1968. He discusses all the principal themes that have animated the discipline in the past two decades with an emphasis on the theory of the subject, the realism-modernism debate and sexual difference. He views these issues through an optic heavily tinted by the work of Yale's 'hermeneutic mafia': Derrida ultimately prevails here over *Screen*'s orthodox 70s trinity of

Althusser, Barthes and Lacan.

Significant, too, is Rodowick's debt to American Marxist critic Fredric Jameson, whose own work on the political ambiguity of modernism is seminal. Indeed, at times one wishes that Rodowick had given as much coverage to the vital new area of film studies inspired by Jameson's redemptive analysis of mass culture as he does to the recent work in cinema studies engendered by deconstruction.

For Rodowick, political modernism denotes the belief that 'the possibility of a radical, political text is conditioned by the necessity of an avant-garde representational strategy... emphasising the material nature of language or cinematic representation, especially in the form of an auto-critique.' But he is keen to insist that political modernism 'refers neither to a film style, movement, nor even a "theory" properly speaking, but rather a logic of order of discourse common to both film theorists and film-makers since 1968.'

Yet for all his painstaking precision to present the complexity of these and other concepts, Rodowick himself at times seems to subscribe to some of the more untenable positions advanced by Anglo-American film theory. The point of departure for *The Crisis of Political Modernism*, for example, is Peter Wollen's opposition-that-isn't-an-opposition, the two 'avant-gardes': the painterly tradition of pure film as practised by Peter Gidal, Malcolm LeGrice or Paul Sharits and the self-reflexive anti-illusionist narratives of Godard, Makavejev or Oshima (in their earlier incarnations).

Nor does the book make the case any better than *Screen* did for film theory's uneasy triangulation of Marxism, semiology and psychoanalysis. As Rodowick indicates, Althusser's (dubious) notion of 'science', Barthes' (vulgar) Marxism and Lacan's theory of the speaking subject seem to cancel each other out. To add Derrida's ambivalent meditations on absence and presence or the priority of language over meaning to the proceedings hardly gives the 'modernism' under discussion a greater claim to political significance.

Finally—and most seriously, in my view—Rodowick is unwilling to entertain the very possibility that the counter-cinema has failed and that its theorists' claims for its political consequences have remained unfulfilled. In assessing the continuing debates over criticism and ideology in contemporary film theory, Rodowick has very clearly portrayed the nature of the 'crisis' of his book's title.

WILLIAM FISHER

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WEST GERMAN FILMMAKERS ON FILM Visions and Voices

edited by Eric Rentschler

Holmes and Meier, New York/
\$49.00, (paper) \$22.50

'Film,' Werner Herzog used to say to his American university audiences, 'is not the art of scholars but of illiterates'—firming up his image as self-taught, spontaneous and gutsy. By and large the notion that the New German Cinema was made by romantics and anti-intellectuals, given to emotion and images rather than argument and ideas, has persisted. It therefore comes as a surprise to realise just how voluble and prolific German directors have actually been both in word and print.

Fassbinder, besides writing plays, published articles on Sirk, Chabrol and Michael Curtiz. He often wrote in support of other, less well-known German filmmakers (Werner Schroeter, Walter Bockmayer), and his collected works, currently being edited, run to double-figure volumes. Even his *Nachlass* of hitherto unpublished material is said to be substantial.

Herzog has written a travel journal and a number of occasional pieces (among them, a fantasy about Jean Renoir and a tribute to Lotte Eisner). Syberberg has published four books: *Syberbergs Filmbuch* is a Wagnerian film aesthetics, *Hitler—Ein Film aus Deutschland* is not just the script of the film, but argues for a new approach to German history. *Die freudlose Gesellschaft* (literally: The Joyless Society) castigates West German society for its materialism, and Syberberg's latest work, 'The Silence of the Forest', is a Spenglerian *Kulturkritik* that joins ecological protest to nationalism and nostalgia for Prussian order.

Edgar Reitz has written numerous articles, collected in a volume called *Liebe zum Kino* (Love of Cinema), as well as a lengthy diary during the making of *Heimat*. Wim Wenders first published his film journalism in the mid-1970s (now re-edited as *Emotion Pictures*), not least because his pieces on Hitchcock, Walsh and Truffaut (as well as The Kinks, Creedence Clearwater Revival and other rock bands) embodied an aesthetic manifesto. *Kings of the Road*, *Lightning over Water*, *Hammert*, *The State of Things*, *Paris Texas* all exist as lavishly illustrated, sometimes trilingual coffee-table books, and another collection of essays has now appeared under

the title *Die Logik der Bilder* (The Logic of Images).

Alexander Kluge, finally, is the author of three volumes of short stories, a detailed collage reconstruction of the battle of Stalingrad, and other works of fiction. Co-author of two hefty volumes of sociology, a book about the European film industry, as well as being editor of a collection of film-political essays called *Utopia Film?*, he recently co-edited a book on the new media revolution, provocatively entitled *The Industrialisation of Consciousness*. The scripts of his films, too, are between book-covers, swollen by notes and critical essays.

This level of activity cannot be explained merely by the expanding market in film literature, or publishers' desire to cash in on a success with 'the book of the film', especially since, apart from *The Tin Drum* and *The Marriage of Maria Braun*, few New German films qualified as hits with the home audiences. Eric Rentschler has done students of the German cinema a great service by bringing together some of the more ephemeral output. In *West German Filmmakers on Film* he has wisely chosen to document the diversity—of subjects and writers. The 'voices' he has gathered are those of nearly fifty film-makers, spanning the period between 1962 and 1984. A general introduction and linking passages by the editor fill in the background to the often topical or polemical occasions that prompted the directors to go public.

Given the scope, Rentschler was right to combine chronology with a thematic perspective. After the obligatory Manifestos come the 'Institutional Challenges' (essays by Kluge, Straub, Schlöndorff, Wenders, Syberberg, Geissendörfer, Helke Sander, Herbert Achternbusch on state bureaucracy and film finance, on distributors, television co-production, censorship). They are followed by 'Generic Models and Utopian Designs', 'Different Ways of Seeing', 'Discovering and Preserving German Film History', down to a retrospective, 'Taking Stock'.

In terms of film theory and film history, or compared to the selections from *Cahiers du Cinéma*, the Germans' visions and voices come from what Helma Sanders-Brahms once called 'a desert for dreamers'. Often, the tone is strident or even whining, the attitude self-pitying or self-serving, and the arguments a curious mixture of otherworldliness and parochialism.

Rentschler himself talks about 'makeshift polemics' and admits that he was 'struck by the urgency and poignancy of these



Hans Jürgen Syberberg, with his daughter, on the set of *Hitler*—a Film from Germany.

pieces, the tendency of their authors to overstate the case, to argue in a fulsome and occasionally frenzied manner.' There are exceptions, of course, and Wenders in particular is passionate and lucid, acute about German history, while cosmopolitan in his outlook on what cinema can and should be.

From another perspective, however, the essays, public lectures, press statements and open letters make fascinating reading. They cast a light on the conditions of European independent film-making in the 70s and 80s, living in the shadow of the American Majors, at the mercy of public patronage, and with television as its bedfellow. Even more obviously, they demonstrate what the New German cinema, as a creative force and concept, owed to the public debates about a national cinema and its place in society. German films in Germany (as opposed to abroad) became inseparable from the general state of film culture, and film culture inseparable from provoking a response from audiences (or at the very least, their self-appointed stand-ins, the critics).

One of the more farcical consequences were film-makers' personal feuds with German journalists. Reitz, for instance, once berated a critic for his enthusiasm about *Holocaust*, the American TV series. Five years later, the only Nazi of conviction in *Heimat* answers to this critic's name. Syberberg's *Hitler* has a section entitled 'the hell of culture', peopled by named journalists. When after its first partial showing at Cannes, reaction to *Hitler* from German critics was, perhaps predictably, less than flattering, Syberberg (who had been standing by the door to see who left the screening early) wrote an open letter to the

national newspapers complaining about their critics' dereliction of duty. Such confrontations point to the key role the press played in making or breaking not only a film's chances of distribution and audiences, but of it being made at all, since journalists had seats on the commissions awarding state aid.

The New German Cinema was, in many ways, most alive where it was directly involved in the cultural politics of West Germany, and this Rentschler's collection reflects admirably and skilfully. What *West German Filmmakers on Film* makes abundantly clear is that every German director was also a producer: of film commodities, of film texts, of film criticism, of film policies. Hence the tendency to speak on behalf of an imagined collectivity of authors, and at the same time to see oneself as representative of an imagined collectivity of spectators. The priority seems to have been, besides making films, to educate the critics—though often thinking that one also had to educate the audience...

This peculiarity of the German situation explains perhaps the 'decline' of the New German Cinema; with the advent of video, and most German films now being produced by television, film-going suffered a loss of cultural prestige, and a corresponding decline in public interest even in the debates, let alone the films. The New German directors, then, unlike those of the *nouvelle vague* (where writing about the cinema predated the making of films), had to make films by writing about them, and write about them in order to make them. *West German Filmmakers on Film* is a fitting tribute to this double struggle.

THOMAS ELSAESSER



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Sight & Sound Spr. '89

Manila

SIR,—Alexander Walker objects to my reference to the Manila Film Festival as 'Imelda Marcos' short-lived film festival'. Well, he would, wouldn't he? Walker now seems eager to dissociate the event from its tarnished 'patron', and, as so many times before, seeks to demonstrate its cultural credibility and autonomy by reeling off the names of assorted luminaries who chose to lend their names to it.

The fact is, of course, that the festival was blatantly and shamelessly a party thrown by Imelda Marcos, a transparent excuse for her to wine, dine, serenade and award meaningless decorations to her friends and supporters. At the time, Walker was not embarrassed to acknowledge Mrs Marcos as the festival's driving force, or to write panegyrics to her 'can-do energy'. Who could forget his gripping piece in the *Los Angeles Times* (the issue of 31 January 1982, to be exact), which began with an admiring description of Imelda's shoes as she tripped through the rubble of the jerry-built Film Center with a group of dinner guests in tow and ended by recommending the French to invite the woman to show them how to run the Cannes festival?

For sustained black comedy, incidentally, this particular piece is well worth a browse in the BFI library. It includes such gems as this: '... one is probably better guarded in Manila than in some of the European capitals and provincial cities where Americans have recently been gunned down or kidnapped. Even a critic like myself rates a personal Mercedes, a lovely Filipina aide and a captain from the air force seconded from the presidential bodyguards for protection.'

I was talked into attending the final Manila festival myself by some hapless members of its staff, who fondly hoped that the lavish funding would enable them to mount a comprehensive panorama of South-East Asian cinema. In the event, we found that *all* film screenings came second to the round of parties, receptions, cruises and fireworks displays, and that the Asian films in particular were treated as poor relations—relegated to ancillary screening rooms, projected in the wrong aspect ratios, often untranslated. Walker claims that the festival was a boon to local and other Asian film-makers, and that several of the Filipino directors mentioned in my article have told him how much they regret the festival's passing. Could he please name names? I haven't heard a single Asian film-maker mourn the event, and the festival I attended

was boycotted by all Filipino directors of recognised stature.

Your readers may judge for themselves what Walker might actually mean when he accuses me of 'political simplifications' and calls me 'partisan', but I have to take issue with his letter over one point of fact. Walker's contention that most Filipino sex films would rate '15' certificates in Britain is risible. As Walker should know better than anyone, the films described in my article would certainly be *refused* BBFC certificates in their original form. Mrs Marcos' decision to waive censorship at the Film Center can only be applauded as a sincerely 'liberal' move by those who, at the time, shut their minds to the banning of films like Ishmael Bernal's *Manila By Night* and the political harassment of directors like Lino Brocka and Mike De Leon.

Yours faithfully,

TONY RAYNS
London SW2

ALEXANDER WALKER writes:

Tony Rayns' political commitment is well known, and if he still tries to represent the Manila International Film Festival as an Imelda Marcos event, well—as he says himself, he would, wouldn't he? It is getting tedious to repeat what the record shows—namely the long, long list of film people who not only lent their names to the MIFF, but their presence as well—and their art. (One I left out, though, was Jörn Donner's name: he arrived with cans of *Fanny and Alexander* under his arm, unsummoned but very welcome.) These people are not political naifs: they could judge an event without having to be 'talked into it'—like the impressionable Tony Rayns, it would appear. They came, they saw, they participated: let that be enough.

Mrs Marcos, I assure you, did not decide on the festival's content or infringe in any way its director's independence or that of the jury, either. It is indisputable that she was more interested in the party-going and party-throwing side of the event. Are there not many—perhaps the majority?—among the celebrities attending Cannes, say, who prefer this side of the event? One would surely attend few films at Cannes if one also attended all parties to which one was invited. But that does not disqualify Cannes, nor does it impugn Manila's value.

The screening of films at Manila was certainly not perfect, either: that, too, is characteristic of countries in a hurry to establish their credentials—witness the annual mess in India and Brazil. Eventually these things get sorted out, given time and good will. Manila had a great

deal of the latter, but too little of the former.

My remark about the Filipino films shown in the cadre of the festival refers specifically to those films, not the general run of sex movies common to the Asian commercial cinema. Such festival films would assuredly have been passed as '15' by British censors.

Lastly, I am not going to be lured by Mr Rayns into naming those Filipino film-makers who have made known to me their regret at no longer having an event like MIFF to give them standards of comparison, aspiration and possibly overseas sales as well. Such people have already been the victims of intimidation by names that are well known to Mr Rayns and his friends.

This correspondence is now closed.—EDITOR

Impromptu

SIR,—As an admirer of Olmi's films, I was most interested to read Jonathan Keates' brilliant article on Ermanno Olmi (Winter 88/89). I appreciate his criticism for portraying on the one hand the details about Italian cultural life today and the attitudes of political and ideological extremists towards Olmi's films, and on the other Olmi's reluctance to be interested in intellectual trivialities. Yet in the same issue I was most disappointed to read Jill Forbes' comment on a Turkish film, *Impromptu*, praised as a successful film from a rather distant and unknown culture. This film might be billed as 'the movie which will change your view of the Turkish cinema' during the London Film Festival, but to what extent it can be defined as 'a brilliant observation of life' in a society of non-Western conventions is a rather dubious matter.

When available information about a culture is not adequate, I think it is not safe to praise any film with strong adjectives. It is well known that all around the world there are directors who make films for the sole end of winning a prize or being praised in film festivals. Turkey can by no means be regarded as an exception to this fact. Moreover, this tendency makes today's Turkish cinema a hallucination of film directors who are trying to project their ideological and political—in this case intellectual—dreams to European screens so as to find interested foreign observers, who in some cases are waiting to share their hallucinations and thus be misled.

The way of life illustrated in *Impromptu* is basically composed of a hallucination, claimed by

B. Sabuncu, former theatre director. Not even one character in the film—except the widow's sister-in-law who repeatedly rebukes her own child and the short sequence of the two transvestites—bears any resemblance to the members of a traditional Turkish family. Even the director himself does not know whether he is criticising the petty bourgeois or an urbanised traditional family; nevertheless, he criticises every convention peculiar to Turkish society today and decisively seeks to abolish them as bad-old-traditions. As a result, the film becomes a theatrical vacuum bereft of traditions in which highly and unavoidably pretentious actors act as if they are the frozen images of an extremely pretentious and raw idea.

It is a pity we do not have a director like Olmi in Turkey, but it does not mean that every film-lover in Turkey shares those directors' hallucinations, a fact, I think, which should be known by foreign film critics.

Yours faithfully,

ZAFER ARACAGOK
Istanbul

Obituary

SIR,—Reading Mr Bob Baker's list of film people who died over the previous twelve months, I am astonished that he makes no mention of Mike Wessen, who died, unexpectedly, on 9 December 1987, and whose passing has not been remarked anywhere else in your magazine over the last year.

As Mike was one of the BFI's most highly visible and universally liked (to say nothing of formidably omniscient) members of staff, first of all acting as manager of the National Film Theatre from its inception in 1956 to 1982, and thereafter as Field Officer for the British Federation of Film Societies, this omission is highly regrettable.

Mike was a true servant of the art of the cinema and he had hundreds of friends all over the country who miss him very much. Some small tribute to him should be made, and I hope you will permit me to do so with this letter.

Yours faithfully,

PETER RICHARDS
Bridgend
Mid-Glamorganshire

SIR,—I am writing (this seems to be an annual letter!) to advise you of two omissions I have noticed from the obituaries in *SIGHT & SOUND's* Winter edition; May: Andrew Duggan, sterling character actor from many films. November: John Carradine, father of David, stepfather of Keith, and featuring in countless films good and bad.

I notice that listed in the obituaries under March is Joe Besser, but according to the 1980 edition of Halliwell's *Filmgoer's Companion* he died in 1972. Perhaps I should get a more up to date edition!

Yours faithfully,
A. C. JENKINS
Ilford
Essex

BOB BAKER writes:

Andrew Duggan was one of the numerous supporting players who go to their reward each year; it is impossible in the space available to list all of them. John Carradine lingered beyond the printer's deadline and will be noted next time. As for Joe Besser, his demise was reported in *Variety* of 9 March 1988 as having taken place eight days earlier. I do not know the late Mr Halliwell's authority for the 1972 death-date. Doubtless Joe Besser will now be taking the matter up with him direct.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ANGLO-INTERNATIONAL for *War Requiem*.

ARTIFICIAL EYE for *Hard Times*.

CANNON for *Sur*.

CAPI FILMS/LA SEPT for *A Story of the Wind*.

CINE-TAMARIS for *Kung Fu Master, Jane B. par Agnès V.*

COLUMBIA TRI-STAR for *The Killing Fields, Housekeeping, Mr North*.

CURZON for *Au Revoir les Enfants*, location shot of Louis Malle.

ELECTRIC PICTURES for *Sans Toit ni Loi*.

FILMARGEN/GEMINI FILMS/LA SEPT for *The Cannibals*.

ORLY FILM/RENNE PRODUCTIONS/CINÉ CINQ/LES FILMS DU CARROSSE/SEDIF CO-PRODUCTION for *La Petite Voleuse*.

PALACE PICTURES for *High Spirits*.

RANK for *Mississippi Burning, Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*.

20TH CENTURY FOX for *Working Girl*.

WARNER BROS for *Midnight Express, Personal Best*.

BO BERGLUND for graphic illustrations for 'The Day the Tramp Was Born'.

BFI DISTRIBUTION for photograph of Errol Morris.

BFI PRODUCTION/TOM HILTON for *Venus Peter*, location shots of Ian Sellar and Gordon Strachan.

HBO INC for *Glory! Glory!*.

NFDC/NEMAI GHOSH/HIRAK SEN for *Ganashatru*, location shots of Satyajit Ray.

STEN ROSENBLUND for photograph of David Puttnam.

RTVE for *Milagro en Roma*.

SOVEXPORT for *Days of Eclipse*,

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

DON ALLEN is director of external affairs at the West London Institute of Higher Education and has written extensively on French cinema; his book on Truffaut in the Cinema One series was published in 1974 . . . BO BERGLUND is a Swedish historian who specialises in early American comedy . . . BEN GIBSON works as a staff producer for the BFI's Production Department. He is a former distributor and teacher and a regular contributor to *MFB* . . . JONATHAN KEATES is a writer and critic who contributes regularly to the *Independent* and the *Observer* . . . RICHARD MALTBY teaches film at Exeter University and is the author of *Harmless Entertainment: Hollywood and the Ideology of Consensus* . . . GAVIN MILLAR has just completed a feature film, *Danny the Champion of the World*, from the book by Roald Dahl, starring Jeremy Irons.

Birdwatcher, Messenger Boy.

UNION OF SOVIET FILM-MAKERS/CLARE KITSON for *Little Vera*.

VIRGIN for *Paris by Night*.

NFA STILLS COLLECTION for *Combat Naval en Grèce, Long Farewells, The Black Monk, The Story of Asia, Asik Kerib, Is It Easy to Be Young?, The Final Test, Mabel's Strange Predicament, Making a Living, Cléo de 5 à 7, Les Amants, Le Souffle au Coeur, Lacombe Lucien*, photographs of Richard Roud and John Cassavetes.

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ON NOW

■ THE COMMISSAR

(Artificial Eye)

Feted worldwide, this 'lost' black-and-white Soviet feature from a story by Vasily Grossman (begun 1966, completed 1987) focuses down from the turmoil of civil war to a remote, vacant town and a female commissar, inconveniently pregnant, billeted, equally inconveniently, on the large family of a Jewish tinsmith. Director Alexander Askoldov is as deft with the big symbolic moments (the soldiers straining with a field gun in an expanse of burning sand as the baby is born) as with the touches of universal family life (the Commissar standing awkwardly for the fitting of a loose print frock). Sweepingly photographed with a masterly sense of how to frame and follow marching columns; and with a classic, stout-hearted performance by Nona Mordukova. (Rolan Bykov, Raisa Niedashkovskaya.)

■ THE THIN BLUE LINE

(BFI)

An unforgettable bit-by-bit account of the nightmare process by which Randall Adams was convicted of the motiveless killing of a policeman in a Dallas no man's land in 1976. Errol Morris, documentary maker and one-time private eye, doggedly tracked down and interviewed almost all the principals, including the true perpetrator of the crime, whose eerie tape-recorded confession is the film's closing image. The matter-of-fact plausible voices, each witness symmetrically framed, are intercut again and again with a slowed-down, blue-burnished, night-time reconstruction of the murder, the whole effect brilliantly complemented by a haunting score by Philip Glass. One of a kind.

■ WORKING GIRL

(Fox)

A spritely, markedly good-humoured, upside-down feminist comedy about a secretary (delightfully played by Melanie Griffith) determined to get out of the typing pool and into the treacherous ocean of New York deal-making, not through greed, but simply from a gutsy, old-fashioned desire to prove she can. Mike Nichols gives this well-worked contemporary subject a relaxed, humane spin, with Sigourney Weaver as the secretary's thieving boss and Harrison Ford as the somewhat doggy love interest both relaxing agreeably into their roles, for all the world as if they weren't stars. The plot, of course, has seen service, but the director's touches of surrealism and his customary off-centre asides neatly place Wall Street in proper perspective.

■ THE ADVENTURES OF BARON MUNCHHAUSEN

(Columbia Tri-Star)

In a besieged city, the dodderly baron (John Neville) interrupts a play travesty of his exploits and offers instead even more fanciful yarns. The grotesque eighteenth-century fantasies are meticulously created, but Terry Gilliam's ill-starred extravaganza boils down to not much more than an endorsement of the right to dream. (Eric Idle, Sarah Polley, Uma Thurman.)

■ ALIEN NATION

(Fox)

Director Graham Baker gives a crisp laconic twist to the tale of two cops on a drug-busting murder hunt: the new immigrants to a future L.A. are humanoid extra-terrestrials settling by their thousand into big-city ways. Juicy roles for irascible James Caan and for Mandy Patinkin as the first alien to achieve detective status. (Terence Stamp.)

■ BURNING SECRET

(Vestron)

This well-upholstered, immaculately photographed version of the Stefan Zweig story, set in a snowbound grand hotel in 1919, about a latter-day Erl King who enchants a small boy in order to seduce his mother, is distinguished by a lithe, immensely suggestive performance by Klaus Maria Brandauer. He is not matched, unfortunately, by the glacial Faye Dunaway. (David Eberts, Ian Richardson; director, Andrew Birkin.)

■ CAMILLE CLAUDEL

(Cannon)

The tragic history of Paul Claudel's sister, a gifted sculptress who became Rodin's mistress, and whose battle to assert an independent creative identity ended in madness. Solidly crafted, well acted, rather clumsy in name-dropping (of 'There's Debussy' — 'Come on, Satie' variety). (Isabelle Adjani, Gérard Depardieu; director, Bruno Nuytten.)

■ CROSSING DELANCEY

(Warner Bros)

Joan Micklin Silver serves a double helping of chicken soup in this affectionate trifle about a genuinely nice Jewish girl (Amy Irving) who works in a bookstore and her attempts to avoid marriage to an if anything even nicer Jewish boy (Peter Riegert) who sells pickles in ethnic downtown Manhattan. Sylvia Miles is the never-say-die matchmaker.

■ DA

(Premier)

Martin Sheen, a New York playwright, returns to Ireland to attend to the affairs of his abruptly deceased father, an old rogue more infuriating than lovable, who periodically pops back to rile his son and remind him of the life from which he gratefully escaped. A touching family story, based on the Hugh Leonard play, effectively transposed and with Barnard Hughes pulling out all the Irish stops. (William Hickey, Doreen Hepburn; director, Matt Clark.)

■ DANGEROUS LIAISONS

(Warner Bros)

The sexual chess game of Choderlos de Laclos' superb novel grips like a whodunit in this adaptation by Christopher Hampton of his own stage version. Superb performances, too, as the Marquise (Glenn Close) and Valmont (John Malkovich) achieve their devastating emotional checkmate. But the original's savage satire is halved by the lack of a persuasive social context. (Michelle Pfeiffer, Swoosie Kurtz; director, Stephen Frears.)

■ THE DEAD POOL

(Warner Bros)

There's a psycho killer loose in San Francisco, and he's got Inspector Harry Callahan in his sights, along with a pop star, a TV personality and a movie critic... More playful than most Dirty Harrys, if directed a mite heavily by ex-stunt man Buddy Van Horn. (Clint Eastwood, Liam Neeson.)

■ HAUNTED SUMMER

(Cannon)

Ken Russell's *Gothic* revisited, the events of the Villa Deodati in 1816 this time viewed with sense, sensibility and a vivid appreciation of the Romantic Agony as a metaphysical encounter between Byron's demon and Shelley's angel. The pentangular relationships (completed by Mary, Claire and Polidori), exquisitely shot by Giuseppe Rotunno, are explored by Ivan Passer with the teasingly elliptical subtlety he brought to *Cutter's Way*. (Philip Anglim, Laura Dern, Alice Krige, Eric Stoltz.)

■ JOYRIDERS

(Cannon)

Forced to abandon her children, Dublin single mum Patricia Kerrigan meets car thief Andrew Connolly and takes to the countryside for a series of encounters with miserable Irish eccentrics. Aisling Walsh's first feature is a resolutely downbeat, bitter-sweet comedy with strong performances offsetting a less-than-sure script. (Billie Whitelaw.)

■ KAMIKAZE

(Blue Dolphin)

Rumpled *flic* Richard Bohringer is set on the trail of demented scientist Michel Galabru who has invented a ray gun which, when levelled at the screen, is capable of killing live TV performers. Less style-oriented than a number of recent French thrillers, this one mixes bizarre hardware and computerised twists with the traditional down-at-heel strengths of the *policier*. (Director, Didier Grousset.)

■ LAIR OF THE WHITE WORM

(Vestron)

Conceived as a spoof Hammer with some serious scares, Ken Russell's latest misbegotten assault on the fringes of English literature (here Bram Stoker's last novel) is much enhanced by Amanda Donohoe's Sylvia the Snake Woman, spitting venom at a crucifix and drowning a

pimpily boy scout in a sunken bath. The worm, when it shows up, bears a disappointing resemblance to a glove puppet. (Sammi Davis, Hugh Grant.)

■ MATEWAN

(Enterprise)

This discursive, low-budget account of a 1920 strike over near-feudal conditions in a West Virginia coal town has its forceful moments, but director John Sayles' evident sincerity fails to compensate for the lack of either analytical or melodramatic drive.

■ NICKY AND GINO

(Rank)

Medical student Ray Liotta is fiercely protective of his simple, good-natured twin, Tom Hulce, who works as a garbage hauler: a black family secret, melodramatically revealed, lies at the heart of this dewy Pittsburgh tale, from Robert M. Young, the director of *Short Eyes* and *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez*. Sentimental and then some; but creditably played. (Jamie Lee Curtis.)

■ PAPERHOUSE

(Vestron)

Boldly uncomfortable fantasy about a feverish child, her dreams lending sinister life to drawings of a house where a boy is mysteriously imprisoned and a malignant intruder is at the door. Unconvincing psychology, but the settings are designed with such visual energy that even the wooden performances and awkward dialogue acquire a cumulative disturbing resonance. (Ben Cross, Glenn Headley; director, Bernard Rose.)

■ THE PRINCE OF PENNSYLVANIA

(Palace)

In a Pennsylvania coal town, Keanu Reeves, miserable because he's too intelligent, concocts a plan to kidnap his father, and co-opts as accomplice leftover hippie Amy Madigan: a sincere if somewhat lacklustre slice of gritty-cum-quirky realism. Ron Nyswaner, screenwriter turned director, regrettably indulges his unappealing leading character at the expense of the fine supporting players. (Fred Ward, Bonnie Bedelia.)

■ RETURN FROM THE RIVER KWAI

(Rank)

Allied POWs en route to Japan near the war's end contrive to get the better of their captors. Efficiently assembled, with intimations of seriousness, but hardly a chip off the old bridge. (Denholm Elliott, Edward Fox; director, Andrew V. McLaglen.)

■ WALKER

(Recorded Releasing)

Relentlessly pumped-up 'true' story of deranged American freebooter William Walker who became President of Nicaragua (1856-57): director Alex Cox, hellbent on drawing parallels with more recent US adventuring, pays one tribute too many to bloodletting Sam Peckinpah. His end shots of real atrocities leave a decidedly sour taste. (Ed Harris.)

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THE COMMISSAR

Written and directed by **ALEXANDER ASKOLDOV**

PG

Based on the story by Vasily Grossman "In the Town of Berdichev"

Starring

NONNA MORDYUKOVA **ROLAN BYKOV**
RAISA NIEDASHKOVSKAYA **VASILY SHUKSHIN**

Music by **Alfred Schnittke**

USSR 1967 Released 1989 • Black & White • 'Scope • English Subtitles

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